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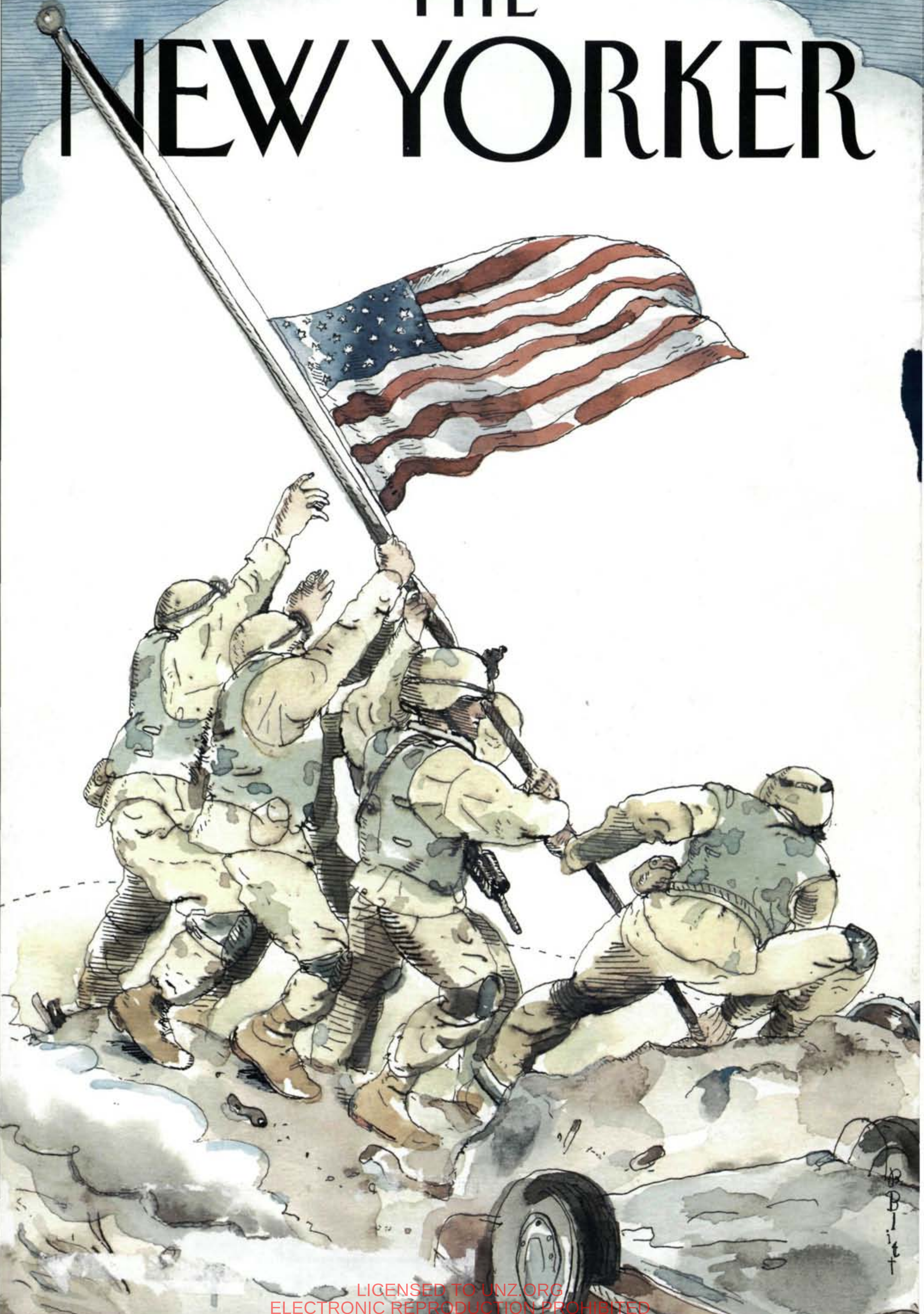
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 28, 2007



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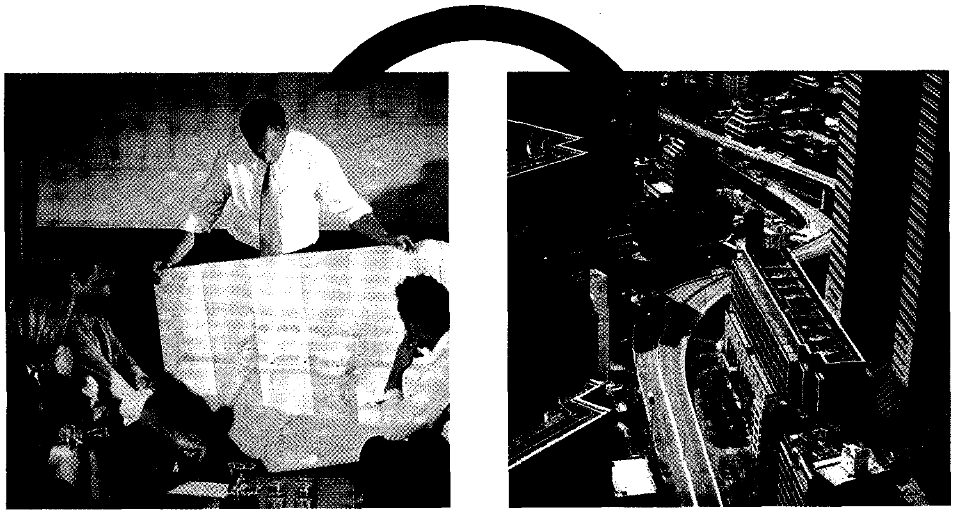

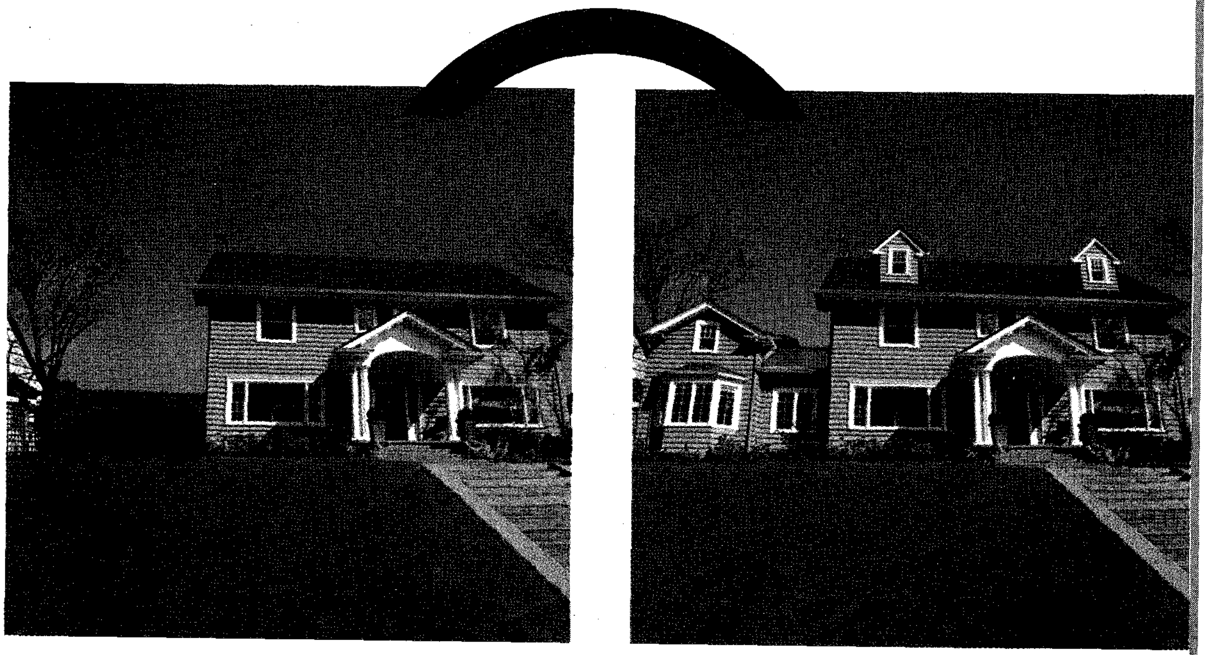

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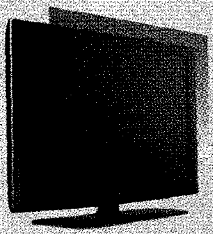

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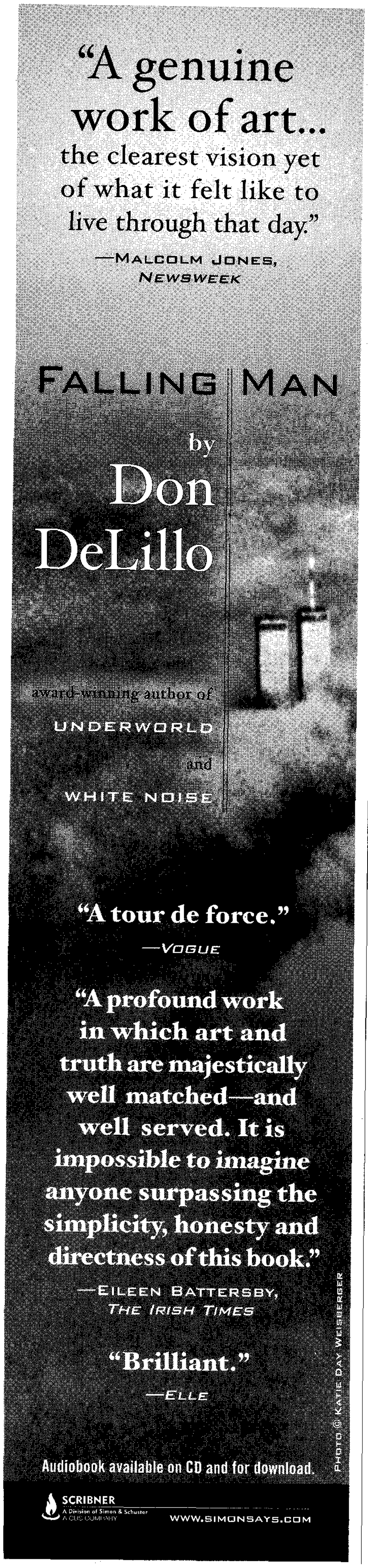
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Rebecca Mead (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is the author of "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding," which came out this month.

George Meyer (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 45) was a writer and producer for the first sixteen seasons of "The Simpsons." He is also a co-writer of "The Simpsons Movie," which comes out in July.

Alec Wilkinson ("Remember This?," p. 38) is a longtime writer for the magazine. He is the author of eight books, including "The Happiest Man in the World," which has just been published.

Jean Valentine (Poem, p. 52) received a 2004 National Book Award for "Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems, 1965-2003." Her next collection, "Little Boat," comes out in October.

Anthony Lane ("A Boy's World," p. 46) is a film critic for the magazine. "Nobody's Perfect: Writings from *The New Yorker*" is a collection of his reviews and profiles.

Paul Theroux ("The Golden Man," p. 54) will publish three linked novellas, "The Elephanta Suite," in September. He is working on a travel book retracing the journey he wrote about, more than thirty years ago, in "The Great Railway Bazaar."

George Saunders (Fiction, p. 66) teaches at Syracuse University. He is a contributor to "The Book of Other People," a fiction anthology that comes out in December and will benefit 826NYC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing children's writing skills.

Nicholas Lemann (Books, p. 72) is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

Grace Paley (Poem, p. 74) is a writer and a poet. Her "Collected Stories" was reissued last month.

Barry Blitt (Cover) is an artist and illustrator. He has illustrated many children's books, including "The 39 Apartments of Ludwig van Beethoven."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Frances FitzGerald discusses the legacy of Jerry Falwell, and her 1981 article on the founder of the Moral Majority. / *Lauren Collins* follows up with a seventy-five-year-old adventurer, now back from the North Pole. / *Dan Baum* explores the art of asking for help, and more daily dispatches from New Orleans. / A slide show of artifacts from Gordon Bell's life log. / From the archives: *E. B. White* on Rachel Carson, *Edmund Morris* on Ronald Reagan, and more. / Video from the New Yorker Conference. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events across the country.

THE MAIL

THE ART OF AGING

The mainstream of geriatric research over the past twenty years has shown that the way we age is largely a consequence of life-style choices, and that a much higher quality of life is available to almost anyone who is willing to work at it ("The Way We Age Now," by Atul Gawande, April 30th). The message of our book, "Younger Next Year," is that most American aging is optional. The science is compelling: exercise, decent nutrition, and emotional and social connections are biological interventions that exceed anything medicine has to offer, reversing most functional aging and giving us strong odds of living well until the end. But we are ignoring that message. As of 2001, only a third of Americans were getting even the minimum recommended exercise, and fewer than three per cent were following federal dietary recommendations fully. In this context, training more geriatric specialists, urgently as they are needed, is not the solution, any more than training more surgeons to staple stomachs is the solution to our obesity epidemic. It is up to us, as individuals and as a society, to take charge of aging. Most of us can expect to live out our lives with quality and dignity—if we choose to.

Henry S. Lodge, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine
Columbia University College of
Physicians and Surgeons

Chris Crowley
New York City

Gawande concludes that there will not be enough geriatricians to care for the large increase in the number of older Americans in coming years. As a geriatrician, I have spent more than thirty years caring for older people, developing clinical and academic programs, and studying the issue of aging; I agree that the way to best prepare our nation for the coming elder boom is to contribute geriatrics training to the education of *all* medical students, residents, and practicing physicians. It is also important to point out that some of the decrepitude Gawande attributes to aging is actually a function of disease, not aging per se. Upon closer inspection, though, many of the negative phenomena attributed to aging are a result of subtle disease, environmental effects, diet, and behavior, all of which are modifiable.

Richard W. Besdine, M.D.
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Providence, R.I.

WANTING TO WORK

Rebecca Mead, in her review of Leslie Bennetts's new book, does not appear to appreciate the price women pay for taking time out from their careers (Books, April 16th). Bennetts is dead-on: the risks are high, and the penalties are huge. According to survey data gathered by the Center for Work-Life Policy, ninety-three per cent of highly qualified women who are currently at home want to get back to work. Seventy-four per cent succeed, but only forty per cent are able to find full-time employment. Undoubtedly there are women who are completely content as stay-at-home wives and mothers. However, the women Bennetts interviewed who profess such fulfillment may be caught up in what I describe as a downsizing cycle: a woman is not able to attain her previous level of employment, and so takes a job for which she is overqualified. She is neither challenged nor promoted and encounters a glass ceiling. Hence, her toddler becomes much more appealing than her dead-end, unsatisfying job.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett
President, Center for Work-Life Policy
New York City

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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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Groundskeepers at Yankee Stadium, in the Bronx. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LINE OF DUTY

In Larry Smith's book "Beyond Glory: Medal of Honor Heroes in Their Own Words," which collects interviews with dozens of veterans who have received the Congressional Medal of Honor, many recipients express astonishment at having been chosen, considering themselves unremarkable. Roundabout Theatre Company mounts "Beyond Glory," Stephen Lang's dramatic adaptation of the book; Robert Falls directs. (See page 9.)

NIGHT LIFE
COUNTRY ROAD

Bright Eyes, the Nebraska native and songwriting prodigy Conor Oberst (he recorded his first albums before he was fourteen) and his band, take over Town Hall for a week with songs from their latest album, "Cassadaga," a sad, sprawling compendium of Americana. The singer Gillian Welch will also appear. (See page 10.)

ART
FEELING GROOVY

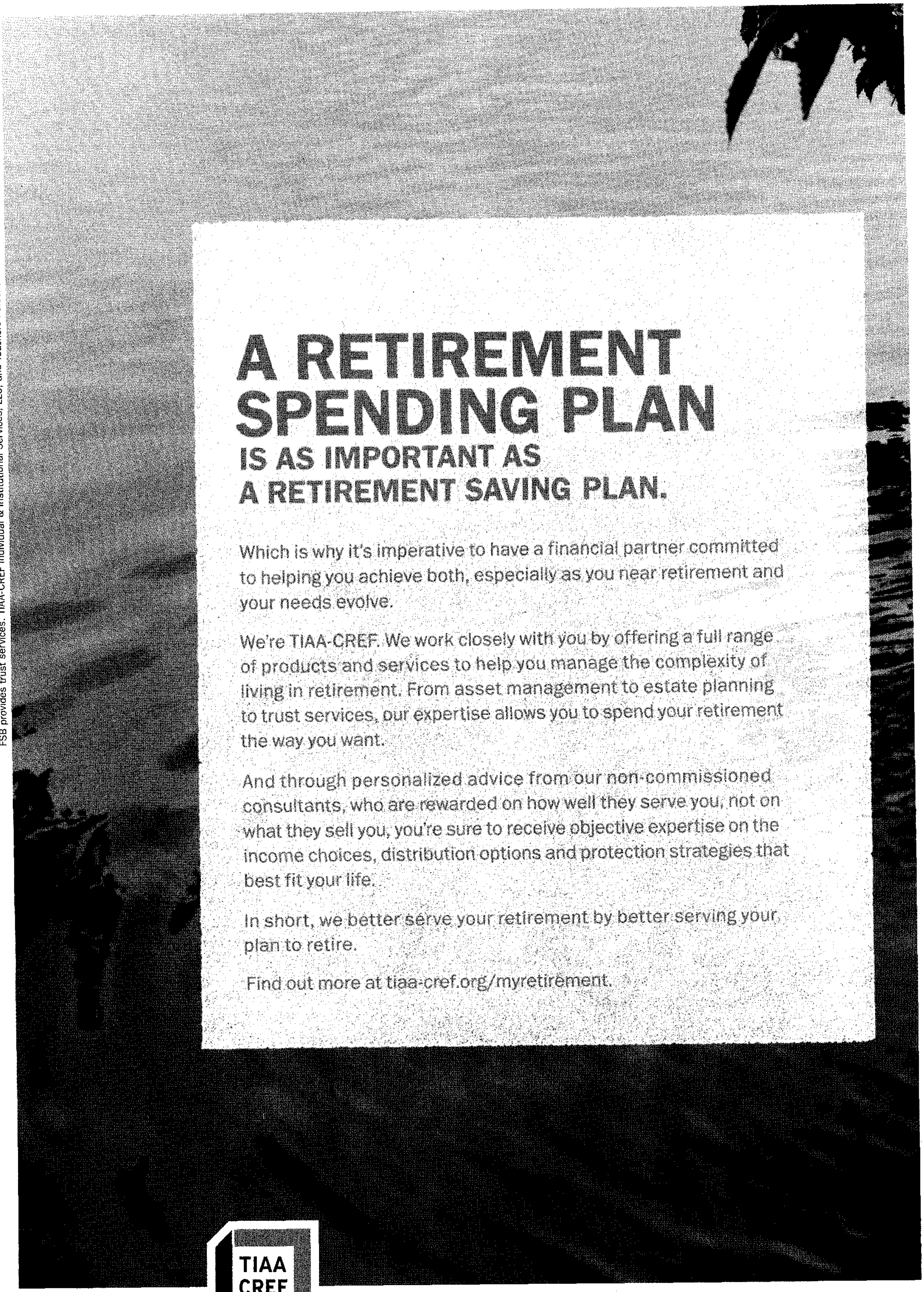
The Whitney lightens up for the warmer months with "Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era," opening May 24. Among the items on view will be works by Yayoi Kusama, Robert Indiana, Lynda Benglis, Richard Hamilton, and Jimi Hendrix (his only known watercolor). (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SONGS OF FAREWELL

The New York Youth Symphony is all about renewal, not departures. But Paul Haas will conclude his five-year stint as the group's music director with Mahler's Ninth Symphony, the most affecting backward glance in the history of music. (See page 16.)

MOVIES
TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Back in the sixties, John Schlesinger had a knack for catching the Zeitgeist, showcasing Julie Christie in "Billy Liar" just as England was ready to swing and focussing on New York hustlers in "Midnight Cowboy" on the eve of Stonewall. Walter Reade offers these, along with his "Sunday Bloody Sunday," written by Penelope Gilliatt (at the time a writer for this magazine), and "Day of the Locust." (See page 20.)



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COLLEGE CAMPUSES COAST TO COAST

SUMMER CULTURAL CALENDAR

University of Virginia • Charlottesville

"Collecting Heritage: Native American Art at the Museum"

March 23rd–June 24th • virginia.edu/artmuseum

While Virginia commemorates the four hundredth anniversary of Jamestown, "Collecting Heritage" features Native American culture, including textiles, clothing, ceramics, and silverwork. Early-twentieth-century pieces by such artists as Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Kay WalkingStick, and George Morrison are on display.

Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire

"Pilobolus Comes Home: Three Decades of Dance Photographs"

March 27th–July 8th • hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

How could the visual legacy of this imaginative dance troupe be anything other than stunning? This exhibit celebrates Pilobolus's thirty-five years as documented by photographers who captured the company's signature style of closely combined bodies forming intricate patterns and shapes.

Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire

"Now Performing at Webster Hall: The Pilobolus Dance Theatre Archive"

April 1st–June 15th • dartmouth.edu/~pilobolus

This behind-the-scenes exhibition features Pilobolean creativity, from the troupe's conception by four Dartmouth students in 1971 to its status as one of the most influential and innovative forces in contemporary modern dance. The company's archives were recently donated to Dartmouth for academic research.

Princeton University • Princeton, New Jersey

"Mrs. Packard"

May 4th–June 10th (times vary) • mccarter.org

In the world première of her play, the writer and director Emily Mann tells the compelling story of Elizabeth Packard, a nineteenth-century minister's wife who is committed to an insane asylum for questioning her husband's religious beliefs. An unlikely hero, Packard ultimately triumphed as a crusader who challenged the mental-health system.

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The Ohio State University • Columbus

Zoe Leonard: "Analogue"

May 12th–August 12th • wexarts.org

This exhibition of Zoe Leonard's approximately 350 photographs chronicles a vanishing way of life in our cities, such as mom-and-pop storefronts. Also in the exhibition is a series of photographs documenting the globalized rag trade, from a Brooklyn clearing station of discarded clothes to used-garment markets in Uganda.

The Ohio State University • Columbus

Chris Marker: "Staring Back"

May 12th–August 12th • wexarts.org

In addition to being a renowned filmmaker, Chris Marker excels as a photographer. His skill is made evident by the première exhibition of two hundred of his black-and-white images. Spanning six decades, the collection includes intimate portraits from his worldwide travels, documentation of political demonstrations, and photographic traces of his films.

Princeton University • Princeton, New Jersey

The Princeton Triangle Club presents "Heist Almighty!"

June 1st, 8 P.M.; June 2nd, 7:30 P.M. • princeton.edu/~triangle

As the nation's oldest musical-comedy institution, the Triangle Club has produced shows written and performed by students for a 116 years. This year's irreverent offering centers on an evil museum curator whose plans to steal the "Mona Lisa" are foiled.

Hofstra University • Hempstead, New York

"Lainie Kazan: In Concert"

June 9th, 8 P.M.; June 10th, 2 P.M. • hofstra.edu/hofstraentertainment

While Hofstra alumna Lainie Kazan's acting résumé boasts copious Broadway, television, and film appearances, she is also a cabaret singer with impressive onstage and recording credentials. In this homecoming, Kazan revisits her roots as a chanteuse in a one-woman show.

Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire

"Aurélia's Oratorio"

June 23rd, 8 P.M.; June 24th, 3 P.M. • hop.dartmouth.edu

Combining illusion, clowning, acrobatics, and puppetry, the director and designer Victoria Thierrée Chaplin enlists her multitalented daughter, Aurélia Thierrée, to entrance audiences with a surreal, quirky world where ice cream burns and alarm clocks ring when it's time to sleep. Who could expect anything less than sheer delight from Charlie Chaplin's daughter and granddaughter?

Lehigh University • Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Zoellner Arts Center's Tenth Anniversary Season

From September 8th • zoellnerartscenter.org

In its tenth-anniversary year, the Zoellner Arts Center at Lehigh University recently concluded its triumphant 2006–2007 season. Upcoming 2007–2008 season highlights include singer Michael McDonald, on September 8th, and the Boston Pops, conducted by Keith Lockhart, on December 2nd.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BEYOND GLORY
Roundabout Theatre Company presents the New York première of Stephen Lang's one-man show, based on Larry Smith's book about war heroes. Robert Falls directs. Previews begin May 25. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE BUTCHER OF BARABOO
In Marisa Wegrzyn's black comedy, Valerie, a butcher in Wisconsin, falls under suspicion when her husband disappears. Judith Ivey directs. Part of the Second Stage Theatre Uptown Festival. Previews begin May 24. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

CRAZY MARY
Sigourney Weaver stars in a new play by A. R. Gurney, about a wealthy woman and her son who visit a cousin in a mental institution. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FACING EAST
A Mormon couple mourn the suicide of their gay son, in a production by the Utah-based Plan-B Theatre Company. Previews begin May 25. Opens May 29. (Atlantic Stage Two, 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

I.E., IN OTHER WORDS
At the Flea, the première of a play by Mark Greenfield, about a young man pursuing his dreams. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

IN A DARK DARK HOUSE
MCC Theatre presents the world première of Neil LaBute's new play. Ron Livingston and Frederick Weller star; Carolyn Cantor directs. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL
At the Mint, St. John Hankin's drama from 1905, about a man who returns home to England to his wealthy father after a failed attempt to make it big in Australia. Jonathan Bank directs. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO
A Ma-Yi Theatre Company production of a play by Lonnie Carter, about a Filipino migrant worker in nineteen-thirties California. Loy Arcenas directs. In previews. Opens May 27. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

ROMEO AND JULIET
Ellen Stewart adapted and directs a dance opera of Shakespeare's tragedy. Previews begin May 24. Opens May 27. (La Mama Annex, 66 E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

TEA
Japanese war brides reflect on their lives in this play by Velina Hasu Houston, directed by Tina Chen. In previews. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-352-3101.)

10 MILLION MILES
Atlantic Theatre Company presents a new musical featuring music and lyrics by Patty Griffin, about a young man and woman on a road trip from Florida to upstate New York. Keith Bunin wrote the book; Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

BRITS OFF BROADWAY
This week at the annual festival of British theatre, "The Receipt," by Will Adamsdale and Chris Branch, and "Memory," written by Jonathan Lichtenstein and directed by the Tony nominee Terry Hands, run through May 27. "Silverland," by Benjamin Davis, continues its run, and "Rosebud: The Lives of Orson Welles," starring Christian McKay, opens May 29. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CLYTEMNESTRA'S TEARS
La Mama and the Greek Persona Theatre Company present a one-woman show, starring Themis Bazaka, based on the tragedy of the wife of Agamemnon. In Greek, with English supertitles. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

DAUGHTER OF A CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY
Marissa Chibas stands alone on a set that resembles a desolate beachhead, recalling the voices of her immediate family members and their roles in recent Cuban history. Chibas's uncle Eddie was a radio broadcaster whose suicide rendered him a sort of revolutionary martyr; her father, Raul, took on Eddie's mission of political change, fighting alongside Castro in the mountains. Even Chibas's vivacious mother, Dalia—the least politically engaged of the lot—was caught up in the restlessness of her era. Under the direction of Mira Kingsley, Chibas portrays her childhood immersion in the mixed emotions of exile with impassioned and physically unstinting acting; though we're conscious of the artifice, we succumb to her magnetic force. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

DON'T QUIT YOUR NIGHT JOB
What do Broadway's stars and also-rans do in their downtime, when they're not signing programs at the stage door? Judging by this spirited revue, the smaller stage has its allure, allowing an Actors' Equity posse to try out sketch comedy, improv, and other forms of mischief not expressly solicited on the Great White Way. The results are a genial mixture of the clever, the spoofy, and the sophomoric. But it would be churlish not to grin at the prospect of watching the prepubescent Henry Hodges (currently cast as the young boy in "Mary Poppins") appear as Tom Stoppard's aristocratic overlord Alexander Bakunin—or the handsome, jocular Patrick Wilson tell his backstage story of the day the lighting cues went awry during the final number in "The Full Monty." (HA! Comedy Club, 163 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444.)

GASLIGHT
Charlotte Moore's painterly production of Patrick Hamilton's 1938 drama, which was the basis for the Ingrid Bergman film, is a quaint delight. Laura Odeh plays Bella, a fretful Victorian woman who is made to think she is going insane by her husband (David Staller), in an effort to throw her off the scent of a nefarious secret. The film, which sharpened both the suspense and the psychology of the stage version, served not only as a thriller but as a high-strung study of domestic claustrophobia. The play, on the other hand, follows a creaky old formula, which, under Moore's direction, turns out to be one of its pleasures. With a clever performance by Brian Murray, as the detective who comes to Bella's aid. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

GOD'S EAR
In Jenny Schwartz's play, a New Georges production directed by Anne Kauffman, the words burst forward in a virtual torrent. A husband and wife (Gibson Frazier and Christina Kirk) employ stylized expression as a defense against the terrible pain of a great loss. "And we'll cross that bridge. / And bridge that gap. / And bear that cross. / And cross that 't,' " intones the wife in an early monologue. But this defense works a bit too well for the play's own good: the audience responds more to the gloss of the wordplay than to the grief beneath it. Kris Stone's set of multiple trapdoors, revealing Hell or an airport lounge or both, complements the cleverness of the script. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-868-4444.)

110 IN THE SHADE
In Lonny Price's splendid revival of the 1963 musical, Audra McDonald plays Lizzie Curry, a spinster who lives in a small house in the Depression-era Texas Panhandle with her father and her two brothers. When Lizzie begins to dream, those dreams are made manifest by Starbuck (the lovely Steve Kazee), a strong dark-haired charlatan who promises to bring a little precipitation to the arid atmosphere—the area is in the grip of a terrible drought. This production beautifully ignores race and casts black and white performers alike in key roles, and McDonald carries us through a range of emotions that are both subtle and comedically satisfying. While Tom Jones's lyrics are adequate, they would be nothing without McDonald's ability to mine them for meaning. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/21/07.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE KAROL WOJTYLA THEATRE FESTIVAL
A series of plays written by Wojtyla, who went on to become Pope John Paul II. "The Jeweler's

TABLES FOR TWO
ANTHOS

36 W. 52nd St. (212-582-6900)—By various accounts, Manhattan is enjoying a Greek-food renaissance; in this view of things, Michael Psilakis is the Greek-American Mario Batali. Psilakis, whose restaurant career began thirteen years ago at a T.G.I. Friday's, opened his first restaurant in the city not quite three years ago. His fourth and latest Manhattan venture, Anthos (Greek for "blossom"), brings what he and his partner, the Apulian-American restaurateur Donatella Arpaia, call first-generation cuisine—traditional offerings in untraditional forms—to its apotheosis.

There's lots of fish, much of it, like the meze platter of crudo, adorned with the unexpected—tuna with ruby grapefruit and coriander, yellowtail topped with artichoke and grape leaves, a scallop on the half shell with Mutsu apple and shreds of ramp. *Skordalia*, a potato-and-garlic purée, has been reinvented as a soup accompanied by batter-fried salt cod (traditional), lightly blanched salt cod (not traditional), and a beet-and-horseradish tartare. A generous portion of pork sits in an avgolemono sauce, alongside dolmas of pork wrapped in cabbage. The trick is to bring agreeable company and to pace yourself—you'll want to taste just about everything, from the little pot of goat's-milk butter that comes with the bread (goat butter turns out to be slightly sour, surprisingly mild, and seductively good) right down to the sprig of arugula flowers garnishing the roasted black bass.

This is food to fuel hedonistic abandon; libations are in order. If you don't know Cephalonia from Paros, the sommelier, Dana Gaiser, will provide a crash course: Cephalonia's in the Ionian islands—its wines reflect a strong Venetian influence; Paros is on the other side of the country, in the Aegean. By the second bottle (a Mandilaria-Monemvasia blend from Paros), your dining companion will be boasting of his own Greek lineage ("My family was from Sparta, you know"). Across the way, a vaguely arty group of twenty-somethings (seersucker and T-shirts, mussed hair) loll in grand Dionysian style. Fair warning: ambrosia doesn't come cheap. At the stroke of midnight, their bill arrives and the revellers' faces turn gray. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $28-$46.)

—*Kate Julian*

Shop" explores the concept of marriage as a metaphor for Christ's relationship to the Church. (Storm Theatre, 145 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444.)

PASSING STRANGE

A savvy rock memoir by the singer-songwriter Stew, who presides over a musical retelling of his prodigal youth. Rejecting his black middle-class upbringing in L.A., Stew's teen-age self (the winning Daniel Breaker) embarks on a "Pippin"-esque quest for meaning, discovering church, drugs, music, and Amsterdam along the way. By the time he ends up in Berlin, faking ghetto cred to fit in with the eighties avant-garde crowd, he's still earnestly searching for "the real" while ignoring calls from his worried mother (the fierce Eisa Davis). Loud and smart and lit by neon, Stew's stylish creation playfully flouts the conventions of the *Künstlerroman*, setting folly and wisdom alike to a heady beat. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

RADIO GOLF

Set in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1997, August Wilson's 2005 drama, which was the final installment of his ten-play cycle on black-American life in the twentieth century, revolves around an old canard: two upwardly mobile black entrepreneurs, Harmond Wilks (Harry Lennix) and Roosevelt Hicks (James A. Williams), are gunning to flatten an area of the district to make room for a high-rise filled with chain stores. In order to succeed, they will have to trash the lives and memories of the neighborhood's colorful habitués. Directed by Kenny Leon, the play is formulaic, often cliché-ridden, and comfortably middlebrow. Wilson uses black people—which is to say, "real," or poor, black people—as the barometer by which all others must be judged; anyone who doesn't fit the bill is just plain evil. (5/21/07) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

BETROTHED: Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444. Through May 26. **BLACKBIRD:** City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **CORAM BOY:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DEUCE:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DIXIE'S TUPPERWARE PARTY:** Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444. **FROST/NIXON:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **INHERIT THE WIND:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JOURNEY'S END:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **LOVEMUSIK:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TALK RADIO:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

The exuberant and industrious Dirty Dozen Brass Band, from New Orleans, rolls into the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill.

DAN JAMES

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 26: The seductive soul singer **Amel Larrieux.** May 27: The staccato, tremolo-ridden guitar of the surf-rock god **Dick Dale.** May 30: The **Dirty Dozen Brass Band** are Crescent City revisionists who put the stomp into everything they play, from Jelly Roll Morton to Michael Jackson. Now that James Brown has departed the stage, these may be the hardest-working men in show business.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 27: Long Island's **Brand New** started out seven years ago as a pop-punk band whose vein-popping vocal athletics were typical of the emo scene. Now, on its third album, "The Devil and God Are Raging Inside Me," the band has made great strides toward a denser, more layered sound. May 28: The **National,** a tight quintet of Ohio transplants with a penchant for shimmering, au-courant indie rock, kicks off a five-night home-town stand.

COLLAPSABLE HOLE

146 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg (718-388-2251)—May 25: The **Quavers,** a Brooklyn-based duo, celebrate the release of "Lit by Your Phone," their new album of moody and enchanting lo-fi songs. The pair's spare tunes combine plaintive minor-key melodies (supplied by the violinist Catherine McRae) and tight, yearning vocal harmonies (supplied by McRae and the guitarist Todd Griffin), with touches of electronica thrown into the mix. Both musicians bring a deep and eclectic musical background to their songwriting; between the two of them they've worked with the indie filmmaker Jem Cohen, the avant-garde theatre director Richard Maxwell, and the cult singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt, among others.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 29: The **Bravery,** a gaggle of young New Yorkers with a thing for hair gel, burst on the scene two years ago with a sound that echoed the polished sheen of such eighties icons as Duran Duran and New Order. The band is currently preparing to unleash its new album, "The Sun & the Moon."

LIVING ROOM

154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—May 24: **Dayna Kurtz,** a slide guitarist with a remarkable voice, can distill beauty out of melancholy as well as deal deftly with the consequences of a happy relationship (a tricky situation for any singer-songwriter). May 26: **Dave Wechsler,** who is half of the songwriting force behind Brooklyn's Piñataland, celebrates the release of his début solo album, "Vacations." May 28: The guitarist and singer **Mike Viola** takes a break from the local Beatle-esque outfit the Candy Butchers for a solo show. Later on Monday night, **Jim Campilongo** performs. American music is a melting pot of influences, but few guitarists capture its nuances as well as Campilongo, who lays down country licks next to blues lines and jazz riffs with a steady virtuosity.

MO PITKIN'S HOUSE OF SATISFACTION

34 Ave. A, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. (212-777-5660)—May 23: The **Chandler Travis Philharmonic.** The irreverent guitarist, singer, and composer Travis, who lives on Cape Cod and has been known to perform barefoot and in his pajamas, has been in show biz for nearly four decades. For years, beginning in the seventies, he co-led the musical act that opened for George Carlin on his tours. His other band, the Incredible Casuals, got its start in the eighties and is a fixture on the New England music scene. This visit celebrates the release of a new album, "Tarnation and Alastair Sim," and one can expect Travis's set of original songs, which mix mind-bending wordplay with Dixieland jazz, shimmering rock, and horn-fuelled R. & B., to go on well into the night: the new album weighs in at a hefty forty-plus tracks.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—The Nashville angel **Gillian Welch** has been busy of late. In re-

cent years she has accompanied Emmylou Harris, Solomon Burke, and Ryan Adams—and she's even taken up the drums for Old Crow Medicine Show. The latest place to find her is in the company of the singer and songwriter Conor Oberst, also known as **Bright Eyes.** His new album, "Cassadaga," finds Oberst and his pals establishing their own alternative-country sound, with Welch helping out on the compelling cut "Classic Cars." The two are here May 25-26 and May 28-June 1.

WATER STREET RESTAURANT & LOUNGE
66 Water St., Brooklyn (718-625-9352)—May 26: The enigmatic singer and Georgia native **Jarboe** comes to town to perform new material with a gothic flavor. A longtime member of the semi-legendary Swans, Jarboe was largely responsible for that group's transformation from purveyors of noisy industrial nihilism to a band with a more melodically lush sound. Her spine-tingling voice, which can reach high into the upper register and still retain its warmth, hints at both backcountry church singing and opera. Most riveting are her unique, extreme live performances, which can border on S. & M., natural perhaps for a daughter of F.B.I. agents who grew up witnessing snake-handling rituals.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 22-27: The **Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band.** The great trumpeter has been gone for more than a decade, but the presence of some of his trusted associates, including **Slide Hampton, James Moody,** and **Roy Hargrove,** insures a virtuosic and lively take on Gillespie's inspired blend of bop, big band, and Latin music.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through May 26: If the married couple **John Pizzarelli** and **Jessica Molaskey** weren't so musically adept—she's a temperate singer, he's a swinging vocalist and accomplished guitarist—they might tip the cuteness scale into the danger zone. In performance, they are as listenable as they are likable, which is a testament to their skills.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 22-27: The **Bill Charlap** trio. Working with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington,** Charlap displays the poise and taste, and, increasingly, the depth of such grand piano stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan. The trio's new album is "Live at the Village Vanguard."

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 23: Manning the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, **Vince Giordano** leads a tuxedo-clad band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. May 24-25: "Another Lifetime: A Tribute to Tony Williams." The unexpected death of Williams, in 1997, robbed jazz of one of its most innovative and influential drummers. The saxophonist **Greg Osby,** the drummer **Cindy Blackman,** and others pay homage. May 26: The drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts** brings in his quintet featuring the saxophonist **Marcus Strickland.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—May 24-26: **Wynton Marsalis** and friends revisit his first Jazz at Lincoln Center commission, the gospel-inspired epic "In This House, on This Morning," from 1992.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 23: The drummer **Rashied Ali** may be best known for his two-year musical association with John Coltrane in the mid-sixties, but Ali has never rested. He's a frequent presence in free-jazz circles, but his new quintet promises more mainstream pleasures. May 24-27: The **Frank Morgan** quartet. Time is now catching up with even second-generation bebop players, so a visit from the deeply musical alto saxophonist Morgan is truly an event. His luscious tone and authentic bop sensibility bespeak an era when individuality was a hard-won prize.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—May 25: Between making cutting-edge small-group jazz recordings, collaborating with the likes of the harmonica virtuoso Toots Thielemans, and providing expert support for the cabaret artist Betty Buckley, the pianist **Kenny Werner** has managed to evade confining stylistic expectations. A solo performance at this temple of Himalayan art promises to further expand his range.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 22-27: A new name to these parts, the flamenco guitarist **Niño Josele** comes to town toting "Paz," an album devoted to music associated with the pianist Bill Evans. His accompanists here include the exuberant bassist **Esperanza Spalding** and the drummer **Horacio (El Negro) Hernandez,** a Latin-jazz mainstay. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poiret: King of Fashion,"** a survey of the career of the Parisian designer Paul Poiret (1879-1944), is at the Costume Institute through Aug. 5. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** opens May 22 with new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. ♦ **"Impressionist and Early Modern Paintings: The Clark Brothers Collect"** opens May 22. Sibling rivalry was played out in galleries, studios, auction houses, and museums for Robert Sterling Clark (1877-1956), founder of the eponymous art institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and Stephen Carlton Clark (1882-1960), a noted trustee of and donor to the Met. This exhibit gathers the outstanding Cézannes, Seurats, Homers, Sargents, Picassos, and more that the brothers competed for and collected. ♦ **"Frank Stella on the Roof."** The man who famously made black paintings in the fifties turns to steel tubing and carbon fiber, a hard and tarry-looking material used in the construction of stealth bombers. His three monumental sculptures (plus a pair of tabletop models) accordingly communicate no-nonsense industrial force—but not without a certain ponderous whimsy: a sail-shaped object set in a circular track responds—at least theoretically—to breezes; its companion features swooping spirals and a bannerlike panel. The third work, "Chinese Pavilion," is a giant organic shape defined by a jagged carbon-fiber lattice. The first two look like transplants from a corporate atrium, but the third would make a great jungle gym if kids could climb inside. Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Frank Stella: Painting Into Architecture"** presents the prolific artist's designs for architectural structures. Through Aug. 5. ♦ The Met's new permanent Greek and Roman galleries are now open. ♦ **"Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Flowing Streams: Scenes from Japanese Art and Life."** Through June 3. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' at 100"** celebrates the centenary of the iconic painting, which makes its home at MOMA, with preparatory drawings and related works. Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Projects 85: Dan Perjovschi."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking."** Through June 11. ♦ Ten large recent photographic works are on

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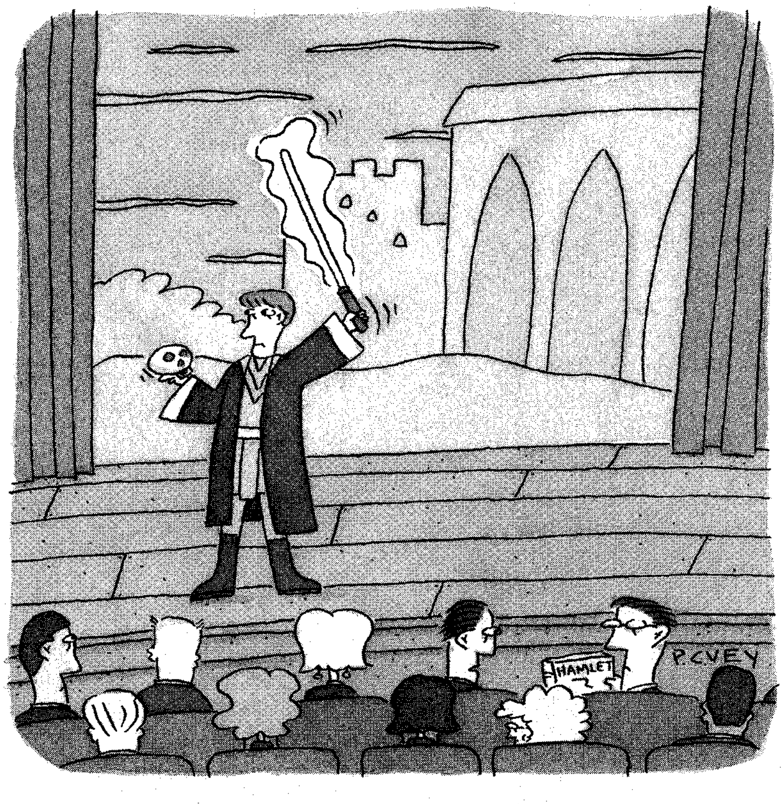
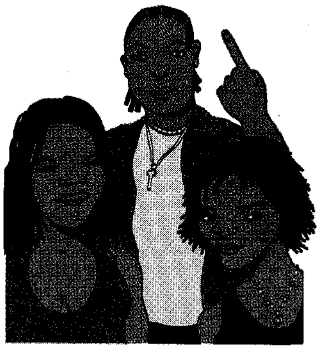


"What scene is this?"

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THREE ON A MATCH

The female hip-hop trio Yo Majesty, from Tampa, Florida, is composed of Shunda-K, Jwl. B, and Shon-B, who bill themselves as "the



only openly lesbian rap group." These days, hip-hop is an increasingly conservative genre, and Yo Majesty's sexuality—along with their tendency to conclude their performances with some toplessness—will probably be discussed more than their music on the message boards and comment threads that form hip-hop's online town square. Yo Majesty can take it—their music is a direct descendant of Miami bass, an unapologetically bawdy and rough-minded genre. The infamous 2 Live Crew—the most well-known practitioners of Miami bass—would probably respond to a song like "Kryptonite Pussy" ("Kryptonite" is a positive attribute in Yo Majesty's world) with something equally filthy. But anybody who has a problem with Yo Majesty's take on hip-hop will likely be greeted with a lively "Rub on my monkey!" Yo Majesty bring their high-energy, lowbrow rumpus to Irving Plaza on June 1.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

view in **"Barry Frydlender: Place and Time."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Hugo Boss Prize 2006: Tacita Dean."** Through June 6. ♦ **"The Shapes of Space"** will open in stages throughout the summer, as restoration work on the Guggenheim's flagship building progresses. Among the works will be installations by Pipilotti Rist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Piotr Ulanski. Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: Restoring a Masterpiece."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy."** Through Aug. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era"** opens May 24. ♦ **"Lincoln Kirstein"** honors the late, great aesthete, connoisseur, and impresario on the centenary of his birth, with an exhibition of work by three artists he championed: Walker Evans, Elie Nadelman, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar."** Through June 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Gold."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ The walk-through vivarium at **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is filled with hundreds of lepidoptera, which alight on cut fruit, lush vegetation, and visitors. Through May 28. ♦ The newly opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape."** Through July 29. ♦ The inaugural exhibition in the new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, **"Global Feminisms,"** gathers work made since 1990 by eighty-seven women in more than fifty countries. Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration."** Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—It has been nearly thirty years since the great sculptor Louise Nevelson (born Leah Berliawsky in Kiev in 1899; died in New York in 1988) was the subject of a museum retrospective. On view in **"The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend"** are mature works from the nineteen-forties through the eighties: her signature, tightly composed sculptures made of scavenged odds and ends of wood painted in a somber range of monochrome colors. Together they serve as sophisticated investigations into form and space. Nevelson picked up where sculptors like Rodin and Brancusi left off, but her aesthetic can be seen in the work of younger sculptors, which makes this show not just overdue, but timely. Through Sept. 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"From Berlin to Broadway: The Ebb Bequest of Modern German and Austrian Drawings."** Forty-three drawings and watercolors dating from the early twentieth century, from the collection of the lyricist Fred Ebb, who left them to the Morgan upon his death, in 2004. Through Sept. 2. ♦ **"Apocalypse Then: Medieval Illuminations from the Morgan."** Through June 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Van Gogh and Expressionism."** Through July 2. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—**"Making the Scene: The Midtown Y Photography Gallery, 1972-1996."** Through Sept. 16. (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Philosophy of Time Travel,"** a collaborative installation by Edgar Arceneaux, Vincent Galen Johnson, Olga Koumoundouros, Rodney McMillian, and Matthew Sloly. Through July 1. ♦ **"Henry Taylor: Sis and Bra."** Through July 1. ♦ **"Silhouette: Collection in Context."** Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

"A CENTURY AND A HALF IN THE ART BUSINESS"
James Graham & Sons was founded in New York in 1857—the same year in which Frederick Law Olmsted was appointed superintendent of Central Park, the Dead Rabbit and Plug Ugly gangs banded together to attack the Bowery Boys, and the city saw its first passenger elevator. For this birthday exhibition, works that once hung on the gallery's walls have been regathered, thanks to loans from MOMA, the Met, and the National Gallery in Washington, among other places. Through June 23. (1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-535-5767.)

Short List

JOHN CONSTABLE: Salander-O'Reilly, 22 E. 71st St. 212-879-6606. Through June 16. **WILLEM DE KOONING:** Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739. Through June 8. **DON DOE:** Mosler, 35 E. 67th St. 212-249-4195. Through June 16. **WILLIAM KLEIN:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 2. **"PICASSO, BRAQUE, AND EARLY FILM IN CUBISM":** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through June 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS
The international group, expert in psychedelic environments, has covered most surfaces of the gallery, including objects and furniture, with 3-D verbal wallpaper. Viewers don masks with built-in red-and-blue glasses, which reveal four-letter words in illusory relief—the dirty classics plus political tags ("BUSH," "IRAQ") and assorted downbeats ("EVIL," "GRIM"). It's fun for a minute. Skeptics may resist the obsessive associations of sex and misrule. (What has sex done to deserve that?) In a basement corridor, flashing neon sculpture and synchronized music will reward the chemically prepared. Through June 30. (Connelly, 625 W. 27th St. 212-337-9563.)

BARNEY KULOK
Although he hasn't entirely digested his influences (Jeff Wall, William Eggleston), this young New York-based photographer (Bard class of 2004) makes a cunning and memorable début. Working in black-and-white and color and in a wide range of scales, Kulok turns out extremely self-conscious pictures of mostly ordinary things: bouquets of fake flowers in a car's rear window, doorbells in a tenement foyer, a stained leatherette headrest, a wind-blown tree at night, a barn. But each of these images is tight, engaging, and surprisingly elegant; the headrest is close to perfection. Kulok's cleverness could be a stumbling block, but he's already started to overcome it. Through May 26. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

MAXIMILIAN BODE

MR.
Mr. is a protégé of Takashi Murakami, the Japanese artist-merchandiser. Sculptures and paintings here exhibit the Murakami circle's fascination with *otaku* culture, the scarily violent, pedophiliac-“sexy” cuteness of manga comics and anime. Girls and boys stranded in postindustrial landscapes, some with their shirts pulled up and their pants pulled down, populate the paintings. A giant sculptural head doubles as a dollhouse and offers a chance to peer inside the brain of one of the artist's blank-eyed imps. What's inside—a scattering of plastic toys and miniature furniture—won't surprise anyone acquainted with this stuff, although Mr. provides a solid primer on the *otaku* aesthetic for those who missed Murakami's “Little Boy” exhibition at the Japan Society, in 2005. Through June 23. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

JOAN MITCHELL
A handsome show of works on paper dating from 1956 to 1992 (the year of her death) exposes the underpinnings of Mitchell's poetic take on Abstract Expressionism. The influence of France, her adopted home, is as evident in skeletal pastels as it is in large-scale canvases; they hum with scraps of blue, green, orange, and pink lifted from the palettes of Monet and Cézanne. Through June 16. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

MIKE QUINN
This appealing début addresses manly obsessions with a slightly old-fashioned Duchampian humor. The detritus of time poorly spent—bottles, cigarettes, pills, sports pages—are assembled into small sculptures, collages, and paintings (the paint is, in one case, mint-green Mylanta), then elevated with bits of gilding and silver foil and varnished wood frames. A pair of pegboard signs admonishing “DON'T DRINK” and “DON'T SMOKE” look like they've been bombarded with pills; cutouts of airborne basketball players are juxtaposed with emblems of couch-potato sloth. Despite themes of unapologetic dissolution, there's discipline here: Quinn is plainly an astute student of Beuys and Rauschenberg (and, he adds, Ryman and McCarthy). Through June 9. (Buia, 541 W. 23rd St. 212-366-9915.)

STERLING RUBY
A pair of installations might be categorized as Dionysian versus Apollonian, maximal versus minimal, or too clever by half in two ways. At Metro Pictures, towering gimcrack structures glopped with tarlike polyurethane suggest charred scaffolding from a disastrous fireworks pageant; gleefully ugly grace notes include a deformed torso in polychromed ceramic and a hypnotic video of colored smoke, over which a voice repeats mantras like “This is the fucked-up pathway; this is the super-flow.” In Foxy Production's small white box, a square-edged, bridge-shaped sculpture of graffiti-marked white Formica all but blocks the door, while Day-Glo posters declaim slogans like “Long Live the Amorphous Law.” Through June 9 (Metro, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100) and May 26 (Foxy, 617 W. 27th St. 212-239-2758.)

STEPHEN SHAMES
Shames was a student at U.C. Berkeley in 1967, when he began photographing the Black Panthers, and his pictures of the group and its leaders reflect a shared commitment. His friendship with Panther leader Bobby Seale, whom he calls his “surrogate dad,” gained Shames the sort of behind-the-scenes access every photojournalist dreams of. But the intimate moments here only serve to emphasize the organization's tough, tenacious public face. For a group so fixated on image, it's no surprise that what's most striking about the Panthers today is their flawless style sense. Without compromising his dedication to the cause, Shames took some of the most thrilling fashion photos of his time. Through May 26. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

JULIANNE SWARTZ
Unlikely hybrids of robotics, chunks of concrete, and three-dimensional drawings in wire, Swartz's sculptures strike attitudes of optimistic pathos—which is not at all the same as pathetic optimism. Hidden motors embedded in the concrete make wire tendrils wave or turn in circles; occasionally two electrified wires cross, causing tiny lights to flare. Wee red hearts bob here and there, and almost invisible scraps of paper bearing words like “hope” tremble, making them nearly impossible to read. In an adjacent room, a suite of skeletal, translucent music boxes (designed by Matteo Ames) pour out disjointed tunes. Through July 6. (Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990.)

MARK WYSE
Wyse, a consistently interesting and unpredictable young photographer, takes the title for his show, “Marks of Indifference,” from Jeff Wall's essay on the intersection of photography and conceptual art. Knowing this is not particularly helpful to understanding just what Wyse is up to here, but it does provide a way of reading his pictures of the scruffy abstraction left behind when shelf brackets were removed from a white painted wall or of a silver station wagon's dented side. Other images—like the show-stopping still-life of a dead squirrel in the middle of a suburban street—stubbornly resist interpretation. When puzzlement is balanced by pleasure, what more could you want? Through May 26. (Wallspace, 619 W. 27th St. 212-594-9478.)

“REBEL, REBEL”
A show dedicated to the Swiss photographer Karlheinz Weinberger, who died at eighty-five late last year, rounds up a smattering of sharp contemporary work by Collier Schorr, Ryan McGinley, and

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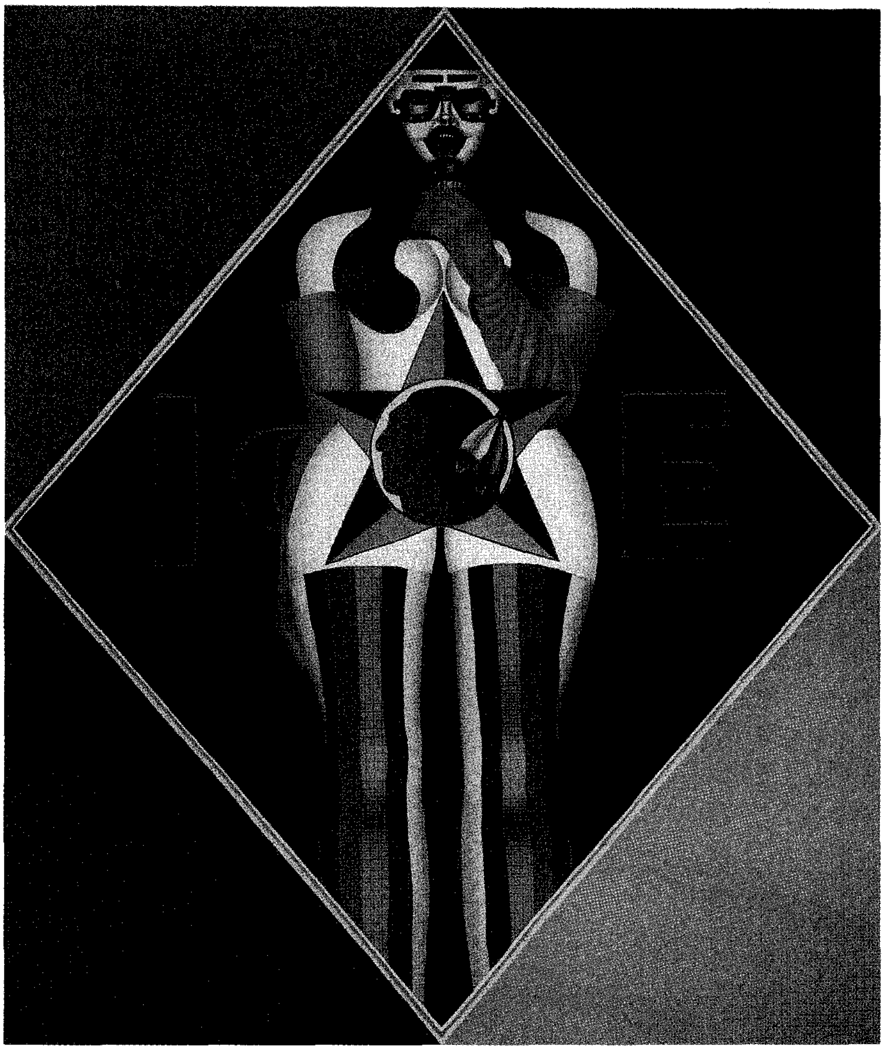
Walter Pfeiffer, but no matter how apropos, it has a difficult time competing with the Master's pictures, most from the nineteen-sixties. Weinberger's subjects were working-class kids who rebelled in outfits inspired by American juvenile delinquents and rock idols of an earlier decade, but taken to bizarrely accessorized extremes. Later pictures of motorcycle-gang members suggest that the transgression and the dissolution were no longer merely style statements. Through May 25. (Kustera, 520 W. 21st St. 212-989-0082.)

Short List

GLENN BROWN: Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 9. **JOSEPH CORNELL / JIŘÍ KOLÁŘ:** Zoubok, 533 W. 23rd St. 212-675-7490. Through May 26. **GERARD PETRUS FIERET:** Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883. Through May 26. **TIM HAWKINSON:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through June 9. **RACHEL HOWARD:** Bohen Foundation, 415 W. 13th St. 212-334-2281. Through May 25. **JIM LAMBIE:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through May 26. **ALEXANDER LEE:** Clementine, 623 W. 27th St. 212-243-5937. Through May 26. **FRANK STELLA:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through July 6.



Richard Lindner's "Ice," in the Whitney's "Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."

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GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

GEORG BASELITZ
A suite of watercolors made last year by the German neo-expressionist hews close to his roots, featuring heavy, morcelated figures fighting through or swooning into bravura passages of paint. But these pictures, from a series titled "Remix," are executed not in magniloquent oils but in fast, thin watercolor, mixed with passages in India ink applied with a feather pen. Ochres and blacks anchor the images, flecked with bleached but festive primaries. Lines are sketchy, forceful but aerated, as if a buoyant breath were drifting through them. Through June 30. (Nolan, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-6190.)

"BEYOND THE WHITE CUBE: A RETROSPECTIVE OF BRIAN O'DOHERTY/PATRICK IRELAND"
"Beyond the White Cube" gathers more than a half century's worth of work in multitudinous mediums by one of New York's most treasured artist-intellectuals. O'Doherty's analyses of art-space semiotics have been seminal. His art (often under the alias Patrick Ireland, a tribute to his native land) suggests a solo, shadow avant-garde in pictorial, sculptural, environmental, and conceptual aesthetics. He can be awfully recondite—the sort of man who, one fancies, reads "Finnegans Wake" to relax—but his energy and wit disarm. Full of surprises, he has lately turned to violently pretty geometric abstract painting. Through July 14. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

Short List

TINA BARNEY: Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166. Through June 16. **TIM HAWKINSON:** Nyehaus, 15 Gramercy Park S. 212-995-1785. Through June 16. **MARTHA ROSLER:** Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347. Through May 25.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
This week at the State Theatre, George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins face off, with a program of "essential" ballets by each. But what constitutes essential Balanchine? In this case, it's "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," set to music from Gounod's "Faust," paired with his beloved meditation on the waltz, "Liebeslieder Walzer," and the complex "Symphony in Three Movements," with music by Stravinsky. Few would argue with the idea that the luminous ensemble piece "Dances at a Gathering" is one of Robbins's greatest ballets (if not his greatest); it will be performed alongside the sunny "In G Major"—set to jazzy Ravel, with stylish designs by Erté—and his homage to Fred Astaire, "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ May 22 at 7:30 and May 27 at 3: "Mozartiana," "Piano Pieces," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ May 23 at 7:30 and May 26 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ May 24 at 8: "Apollo," "Orpheus," and "Agon." ♦ May 25 at 8: "Carousel (a Dance)," "Middle Duet," "Moves," and "La Sonnambula." ♦ May 26 at 2 and May 29 at 7:30: "In G Major," "Dances at a Gathering," and "I'm Old Fashioned." (Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 24.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Lar Lubovitch's "Othello" is the season's major revival, with four performances this week. The ballet features a striking design, by George Tsypin, of projections and massive Plexiglas plates, and a melodramatic score by Elliot Goldenthal. The feel of the choreography is modern, with Lubovitch's characteristic lush, surging movement; the mood is darkly romantic, with an undercurrent of violence. Julie Kent and Marcelo Gomes perform Desdemona and Othello on opening night, followed by Gillian Murphy and David Hallberg (an incisive actor); then the petite Xiomara Reyes and the guest performer Rasta Thomas (with the fine Jared Matthews as Cassio); and, in the final performance, the beautiful Alessandra Ferri, who will retire from A.B.T. this season, débuts in the role of Desdemona, partnered by Gomes. ♦ May 22 and May 24 at 8 and May 23 at 2 and 8: "Othello." ♦ May 25 and May 28-29 at 8 and May 26 at 2 and 8: "Symphonie Concertante" and "The Dream." (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through July 7.)

MOMIX
Moses Pendleton's amazingly flexible, strong, and willing dancers can turn themselves into just about anything and, through clever tricks with light and props, defy gravity or disappear altogether. In the company's three-week visit to the Joyce, it presents "MOMIX Remix," a best-of anthology from the past quarter century, including excerpts from "Orbit," "Lunar Sea," "Opus Cactus," and "Baseball." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 22-23 and May 29 at 7:30, May 24-25 at 8, May 26 at 2 and 8, and May 27 at 2 and 7:30. Through June 10.)

THE BOOGIE DOWN DANCE SERIES
The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, the center of the borough's budding dance scene, puts on a festival. On Thursday, Bill T. Jones introduces the work of Erick Montes, Malcolm J. Low, and Leah Cox (who have all danced in his company). And on Friday the downtown choreographers Pedro Jimenez, Levi Gonzalez, and Ann Liv Young take their creations farther uptown than that term usually signifies. (841 Baretto St. 718-842-5223. May 24-25 at 8.)

EIKO AND KOMA
In "Cambodian Stories Revisited," the Japanese-American duo continues a collaboration with teen-age Cambodian art students that produced last year's "Cambodian Stories." Like a detail of the previous work, the new iteration focusses on the unaffected lead dancers, Charian (Chakreya So) and Peace (Setheap Sorn), and their cross-generational interaction with the choreographers. Danspace Project presents the performance free in the graveyard of St. Mark's Church, amid paint-

ings by the Cambodian collective. (Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 24-27 at 8:30.)

"DANCEAFRICA"
For thirty years now, BAM's annual festival has been teaching audiences that when Chuck Davis cries out "*Ago!*" ("Attention!") the appropriate answer is "*Amee!*" ("I'm listening!"). The sound of that group response—unhesitant and assured, yet welcoming of new voices—is a small mark of the education that Davis and his festival have given New York. For the anniversary, companies come from Uganda, Philadelphia, and New York, and traditions come from the African diaspora. And, as always, the party spills over into an outdoor bazaar. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. May 25 at 7:30 and May 26-27 at 2 and 7:30.)

"TAP EXTRAVAGANZA"
Usually an overstuffed, underorganized affair, the annual celebration of National Tap Dance Day found some discipline last year, with a running time closer to two hours than to four. This time, the lineup is especially strong, with Max Pollak, Tamango, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, and the great Jimmy Slyde, among others. Savion Glover hits the boards to honor his mother, Yvette—who's getting an award this year and whose maternal encouragement, voiced from the audience, is part of the event's charm every year. (F.I.T., Haft Auditorium, 227 W. 27th St. 212-279-4200. May 27 at 7.)

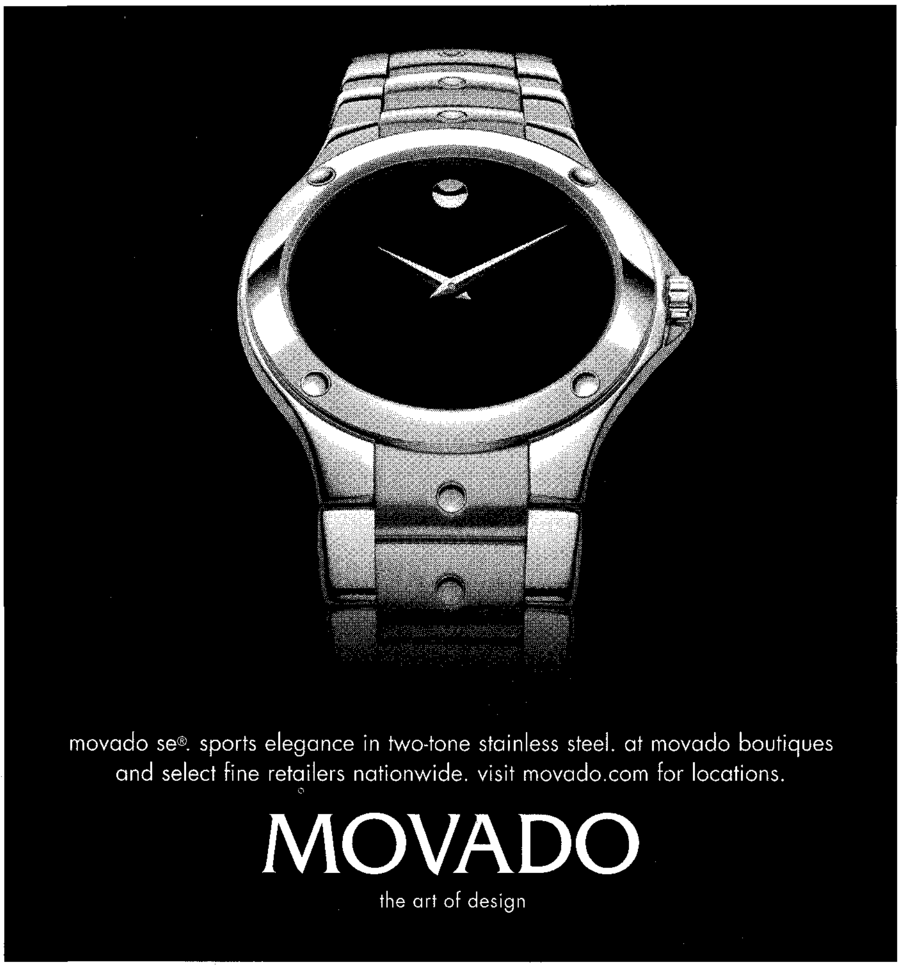
WALLY CARDONA QUARTET
In Cardona's "SITE," half the stage is covered by taped-together sheets of brown paper, the other half by wooden boards of equal thickness and various shapes. Throughout the work, the performers shift the boards around, purposefully, to no immediately discernible purpose. Like soloists, they act separately, their interactions seeming serendipitous. Eventually, they come together to build cantilevered structures, suspenseful and moving in their precariousness. What happens to the paper is a bigger surprise. Phil Kline's audience-enveloping sound design includes recorded and live musicians from Capital High School of Helena, Montana. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 29 at 7:30. Through June 2.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Lorin Maazel, long a champion of young violin talent, has been a supporter of Julian Rachlin's since the violinist first won acclaim, in the late nineteen-eighties. They collaborate in Saint-Saëns's Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor, an elegant young-fiddler vehicle, on one of those preserved-in-amber programs (also featuring Rimsky-Korsakov's "Russian Easter Overture" and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra) that delight the orchestra's traditional audience. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 24 at 7:30 and May 25-26 at 8.) ♦ The "Carnival Overture" by Dvořák, who once lived in New York, starts off the Philharmonic's Memorial Day concert, which also features Brahms's First Symphony. Xian Zhang, the orchestra's gifted associate conductor, leads the group in this annual free event at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. May 28 at 8. No tickets required.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
As a prelude to the conservatory's commencement ceremonies, on May 25, James De Preist leads its finest ensemble in music by Beethoven, the eternal poet of affirmation—the "Leonore" Overture No. 3, and the Ninth Symphony (with the singers Brenda Rae, Ronnita Nicole Miller, Jeffrey Behrens, and Sidney Outlaw, along with the Juilliard Choral Union). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 23 at 8.)

METROPOLIS ENSEMBLE
With Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center entering their end-of-season lulls, this is a time for young ensembles to seize the spotlight. The artfully decayed neo-Gothic ambience of the Angel Orensanz Center will provide an evocative backdrop for Andrew Cyr's chamber orchestra, which will offer the U.S. première of the Mandolin Concerto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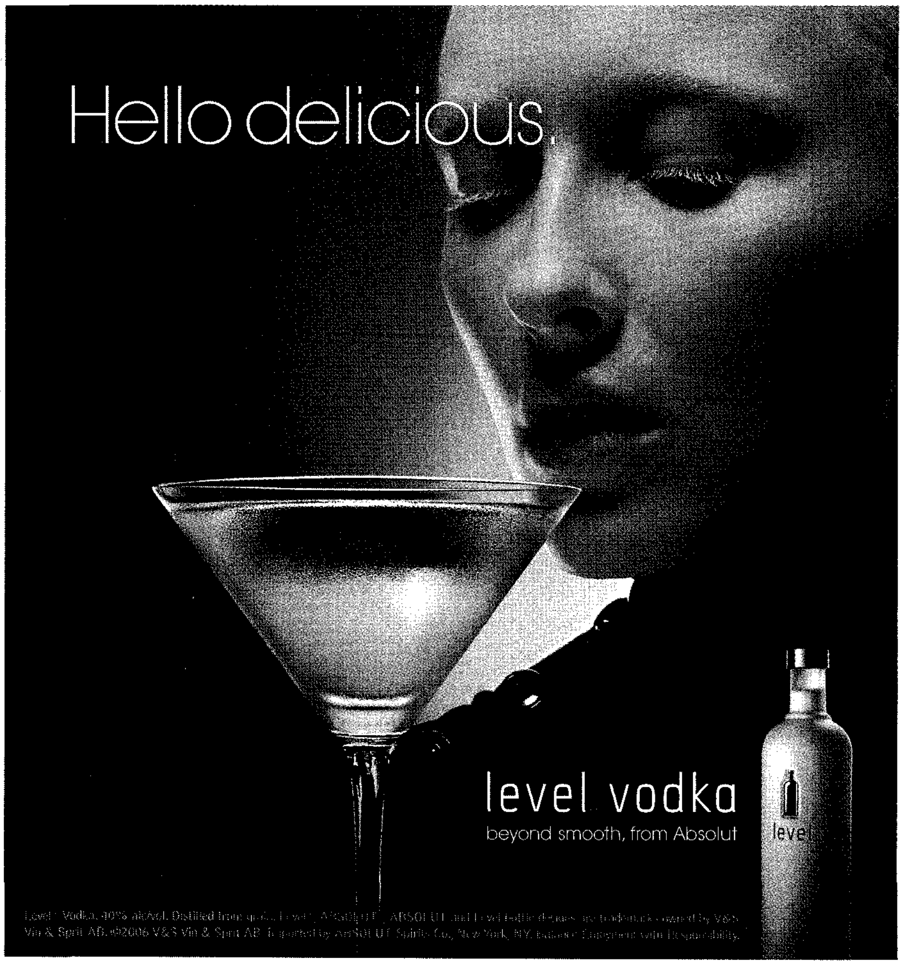

(with Avi Avital) by the acclaimed young Israeli composer Avner Dorman along with invigorating works by Bartók, Shostakovich (the Chamber Symphony, Op. 110a, an arrangement of the Eighth Quartet), and Osvaldo Golijov ("Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind"). (172 Norfolk St. 212-838-3006. May 24 at 7:30.)

ONE WORLD SYMPHONY
Shostakovich, and the myth surrounding his career, is a lodestar for Sung Jin Hong's young band: the savage Scherzo from the Symphony No. 10, allegedly a musical portrait of Stalin, leads off "Superheroes and Supervillains," a concert that continues with Michael Daugherty's "Metropolis Symphony" and excerpts from John Williams's score for the film "Superman." (Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. May 25 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY: MAHLER'S SYMPHONY NO. 9
The group's music director, Paul Haas, ends his successful five-year tenure with a performance of Mahler's valedictory masterwork, one of the supreme challenges of the orchestral repertory, in a program that also includes "Matthew Says," an arrangement by Haas of Passion chorales by Bach and Telemann (with the Symphony Singers), and, of course, a new work by an outstanding young composer (Dan Visconti's "Some Day the Sun Won't Shine"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 27 at 2.)

RECITALS

MUSICIANS EMERGENCY FUND
The long-established foundation's occasional concerts feature big-name artists getting together for programs of traditional fare. Glenn Dicterow, the Philharmonic's concertmaster, joins the violist Michael Tree, the cellist Carter Brey, and the pianist Li Jian to perform music by Schumann, Kodály (the brilliant Duo for Violin and Cello), Chopin, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor) at Zankel Hall. (212-247-7800. May 23 at 7:30.)

MAYA BEISER: "ALMOST HUMAN"
The Israeli-American downtown cello goddess launches a new album in the relaxed atmosphere of Joe's Pub, performing works by Michael Gordon (the captivating "Light Is Falling," with video by Bill Morrison), Osvaldo Golijov, Eve Beglarian, Joby Talbot, and the fiddler Mark O'Connor (who joins Beiser in his Double Concerto). (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. May 24 at 7:30.)

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM
Elisabeth von Magnus, a Viennese mezzo-soprano, takes the stage at the Forum's diminutive, blondwood concert hall for a recital of songs by Kurt Weill from the stage works of his French and American periods (such as "Marie Galante," "Street Scene," and "Lost in the Stars"). (11 E. 52nd St. May 24-25 at 8. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300.)

"SATURDAYS WITH BUXTEHUDE"
John Scott, who is not only the director of the St. Thomas Choir but a virtuoso organist besides, offers the last in a series of forty-five-minute concerts celebrating the three-hundredth birthday of the Danish master, whose works for the organ were profoundly admired by Handel and Bach. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. May 26 at 4. No tickets required.)

WORDLESS MUSIC SERIES
The young impresario Ronen Givony's new series, dedicated to wiping away the boundaries between contemporary classical and rock, concludes an exciting first season with a tribute to Chicago's Kranky label and two of its artists, the ambient composers Loscil and Brian McBride. Among the performers is the Caleb Burhans String Quartet, who will also offer (with video projections) a rendition of Steve Reich's modern classic, "Different Trains." (Church of the Good Shepherd, 152 W. 66th St. May 26 at 7:30. To reserve tickets, see www.wordlessmusic.org.)

BREAK OF REALITY
Somewhere between Shostakovich and heavy metal lies this "rock group" of three cellists and a percussionist, who met as students at the Eastman School of Music. Their next gig is at Galapagos, the Williamsburg bar and performance space that boasts an atmosphere of both timeless elegance and laid-back cool. (70 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. May 26 at 7:30. Tickets at the door.)

YARN/WIRE
A quartet of two pianists and two percussionists has to be enterprising to survive, since Bartók's sonata is the only repertory work for the combination. This group of former Stony Brook students has concertized around the country; they come to the Tenri Cultural Institute to offer a portrait concert of the up-and-coming Taiwanese composer (and IRCAM alumna) Mei-Fang Lin. (43A W. 13th St. May 26 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"MUSIC UNDER CONSTRUCTION": MORTON FELDMAN CELEBRATION
The Small Movements Ensemble and a group of dancers led by Bryan Hayes pay tribute to the burly master of the postwar downtown scene, with performances of such delicate works as "Only" and "For Aaron Copland." (Merce Cunningham Studio, Bethune St. at Washington St. 212-924-7882. May 26-27 at 8.)

ROULETTE: ROCCO DI PIETRO
The pianist Kathleen Supové and the flutist Robert Dick, among others, gather at the experimental-music center to perform a selection of works by the American modernist composer (and Boulez authority), including "Prison Dirges," part of which was written for the Kronos Quartet. (20 Greene St. 212-219-8242. May 26 at 8:30. For a complete listing of concerts, see www.roulette.org.)

"FREE FOR ALL AT TOWN HALL": KONSTANTIN LIFSCHITZ
The popular series, which boasts a level of talent far out of proportion to its entrance fee, concludes with a return by the sophisticated and technically commanding young Russian pianist, who, in a two-part concert with a dinner break, offers Books I and II of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. (123 W. 43rd St. May 27 at 2 and 7. Free tickets, which are limited to two per customer, will be available beginning at noon on the day of the concert.)

"MUSIC OF QUEENS COMPOSERS"
As the cultural imprint of the borough continues to widen, an increasing number of classical composers are making their mark. The soprano Judith Kellock, a seasoned new-music expert (accompanied by Sar Shalom Strong and Tom Cipullo), performs a selection of songs by such current or former Queens residents as Charles Fussell, Cipullo, and the great Luigi Dallapiccola. (Jewish Center of Jackson Heights, 37-06 77th St., Queens. May 27 at 4. A donation is suggested.)

CLARION MUSIC SOCIETY
After a decade away, this legendary period-instrument ensemble—New York's first—has come back to life this season with a new music director, Steven Fox. One of his specialties, Russian early music, will be the focus of the group's next concert, an evening of vocal and instrumental works from the Italianate court of Catherine the Great by such composers as Galuppi, Berezovsky, and Bortniansky. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 29 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

AMU
In this drama, an émigré returns from the United States to India, where she uncovers information about a genocide. Directed by Shonali Bose. In Bengali, English, Hindi, and Punjabi. Opening May 25. (Cinema Village and ImaginAsian.)

ANGEL-A
A comedy, directed by Luc Besson, about a suicidal con man who is redeemed by love. Starring Jamel Debbouze and Rie Rasmussen. In French and Spanish. Opening May 25. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE BOSS OF IT ALL
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 23. (IFC Center.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LOOKING BACK

If you were interested in the art of photography in the early nineteen-seventies, there were very few places in New York to indulge that passion. The scrappiest, most unpredictable, and least inviting was the Midtown Y Photography Gallery, a stark corridor near the locker rooms in a Y.M.-Y.W.H.A. on East Fourteenth Street that provided hundreds of photographers with a launching pad between 1972 and 1996 (it moved to another equally awkward location for its last three years). An astute exhibition at the New York Public Library, drawn from its holdings of the gallery's archives, includes early photos by Peter Hujar, Dawoud Bey, Larry Fink, Anthony Barboza, Arlene Gottfried, Ari Marcopoulos, Abelardo Morell, and Michael Spano, but it's just as sensitive to work by people whose careers fizzled and stalled. By including the washouts along with the breakouts, the show re-creates the gritty, unvarnished texture of a crucial period in photography's history both as a medium and a market. A wall of pictures taken along the entire length of Fourteenth Street by Sy Rubin in the late seventies and early eighties grounds the show in a neighborhood that's seen it all.

—Vince Aletti

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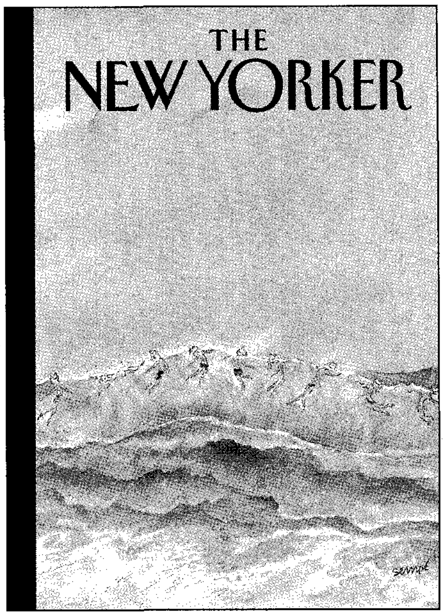

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BUG
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 25. (In wide release.)

GOLDEN DOOR
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 25. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HOLLYWOOD DREAMS
A comic drama by Henry Jaglom about a small-town girl (Tanna Frederick) who goes to Hollywood to become a star. Opening May 25. (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3 and Quad Cinema.)

I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN YOU
A documentary about the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, directed by Richard Trank and narrated by Nicole Kidman. Opening May 23. (Quad Cinema.)

NINE STAR HOTEL
A documentary about Palestinian men seeking to cross into Israel in search of work. Directed by Ido Haar. In Arabic. Opening May 23. (Film Forum.)

PAPRIKA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 25. (In wide release.)

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END
Directed by Gore Verbinski; starring Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, and Keira Knightley. Opening May 25. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AWAY FROM HER
Julie Christie is sixty-six, but her face hasn't lost its beautiful definition—the downward-turning mouth, the slightly pointed chin, the eyes that can explode with wrath. Her temperament hasn't fallen out of shape, either. As Fiona, an Ontario woman succumbing to Alzheimer's, she seems quite lost one second but then, as an intention pierces through a cloud of unhappiness, becomes crisp and incisive. Christie, turning a medical condition into a dramatic coup, makes it impossible for us merely to feel sorry for Fiona, and that toughness gives the film the abrupt, challenging intelligence of a fresh and exploratory work rather than the soft piteousness of, say, a "Movie of the Week" from 1973. With Gordon Pinsent, the veteran Canadian actor, who has a capacious gut, a fine beard, and the burnished aspect of an aging lion, as Grant, Fiona's longtime husband; Michael Murphy as the stricken man whom Fiona falls in love with at an assisted-living facility; and Olympia Dukakis as the practical old broad who gives Grant a way to remain loyal yet survive as a man. The young Canadian actress Sarah Polley adapted the Alice Munro story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and also directed the movie, with attention to the human mysteries and a feeling for the spiritual meaning of landscape. In all, a minor triumph.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/14/07.) (In wide release.)

THE BOSS OF IT ALL
With its well-turned script and throwaway images, Lars von Trier's office comedy is a Dogma manifesto. Ravn (Peter Gantzler), the founder of a Danish high-tech firm, has been hiding in plain sight for years, claiming to be an underling; now, with his company about to be sold to competitors from Iceland, he hires his actor friend Kristoffer (Jens Albinus) to impersonate the absent "boss of it all" and sign the papers. But when complications force Kristoffer into contact with the employees, the impostor is compelled to improvise. Von Trier offers a twisty plot, droll dialogue, capable actors, and images intentionally degraded by his "Automavision" gimmick, a computer connected to the camera that randomly creates shots of an amateurish incompetence. Lighting, sound, and angles cut together arbitrarily, but the resulting slapdash film is one with the allegorical script: before the vapid Kristoffer's star turn as the company's "auteur," the enterprise rolled along with a life of its own. Calculatedly self-promoting in his self-effacing trickery, von Trier again makes a work of an audacity—this time, not as tragedy but as farce—that belongs more to advertising than to cinema. In Danish and Icelandic.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

BUG
Tracy Letts's play, about a delusional war veteran who ensnares a lonely woman in a folie à deux, may have been jolting onstage, but his screen adaptation of it, as directed by William Friedkin, is implausible, overwrought, and laughable. Fine actors (including Ashley Judd, Michael Shannon, and Harry Connick, Jr.) give their all in performances of over-the-top commitment which are part of the problem. The theatrical trickery renders all the more ludicrous the film's vain lurching toward big statements.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

EVEN MONEY
The director Mark Rydell ("The Rose," "On Golden Pond") suffuses this hard-nosed anti-gambling drama with the grim knowledge that, in the end, the house always wins. The script, by Robert Tannen, links the fortunes of ten characters in a round of doomed compulsion: an English professor (Ray Liotta) whose novelist wife (Kim Basinger) abandons work and home for the casino; the washed-up magician (Danny DeVito) she meets there; an indebted sports bettor (Forest Whitaker) who wants his younger brother, a college basketball star (Nick Cannon), to shave points; two small-time bookies, one of whom (Jay Mohr) loves the action and the other of whom (Grant Sullivan) loves a nurse (Carla Gugino) who wants him to quit; a suave, sadistic mobster (Tim Roth); and the war-wounded detective (Kelsey Grammer) who collects the bodies as they fall. Rydell's blunt moralism and almost campy sincerity seem a throwback to distant decades. He elicits amazingly vivid and concise performances (especially from DeVito and Whitaker) and, without rummaging through backstories, simply shows the lure of the payoff to be irresistible to certain unfortunate souls. Despite huge gaps in the plot and some implausible staging, the old-school storytelling exudes a primal force.—*R.B.* (Empire 25 and 19th Street East 6.)

FAY GRIM
Nine years after "Henry Fool," Hal Hartley delivers a curious sequel. The disreputable Henry (Thomas Jay Ryan) has gone missing; he is either dead or in Europe, if you consider that a choice. Simon Grim (James Urbaniak), the garbage-man poet of Woodside, Queens, is in prison, despite his Nobel Prize, while his ditzy sister Fay (Parker Posey) struggles to raise her difficult teen-age son (Liam Aiken). The stalemate is broken when a C.I.A. man (Jeff Goldblum, the best thing in the movie) declares an interest in Henry's private notebooks, thus triggering a quest that will suck in Simon's publisher (Chuck Montgomery), a beautiful Israeli spy (Saffron Burrows), and other interested parties. Fay travels to Paris and thence to Istanbul, but with every step the story loses power, as we come to realize that Hartley, the laureate of dysfunctional suburbia, is unwisely broadening his horizons. He even seems to believe his own MacGuffin, and the result is a half-hearted and implausible thriller; would Henry, a devout littérateur, really find himself on the fringes of Islamic jihad?—*Anthony Lane* (5/21/07) (In wide release.)

GOLDEN DOOR
Emanuele Crialese wrote and directs this expensive-looking film, which follows a Sicilian man, Salvatore Mancuso (the strapping Vincenzo Amato), his two sons, and his mother as they leave their simple rural existence behind for an arduous journey on a steamer for America. Once on board, Salvatore becomes respectfully enamored of a rich, peevish young Englishwoman, Lucy (Charlotte Gainsbourg). The overlong film is peppered intermittently with Salvatore's surreal fantasies—giant vegetables, rivers of milk, money raining from trees—and it's hard to tell whether he believes them or not. High points include some truly funny father-son skirmishes and a rewarding sequence at Ellis Island, in which the immigrant hopefuls are tested to see if they are worthy of

entering their promised land. In Italian and English.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE HIRED HAND

Peter Fonda's directorial début, from 1971, is a lyrical flight—ninety minutes of impassioned imagery about marital and fraternal loyalty, manhood, and (what's rarer for a Western) womanhood, too. It picks up a pair of decent, affable drifters (Fonda and Warren Oates), just when Fonda has sickened of the winding trail that was supposed to lead to California and has decided to go home to the wife and daughter he abandoned seven years before. After a horse thief kills their young third partner, Oates chooses to settle down for a spell, too. Oates never gave a subtler, warmer performance than as a man who unexpectedly takes to domesticity. Always robust and true, Verna Bloom, as Fonda's wife, conveys an extraordinary aura of sexual mortification. Fonda, touching as an actor, proves astonishing as a director, using a fluid, tactile style to conjure a life lived close to the elements and to sudden death. The way he stages violence ramifies shock into diverse stunned emotions: awe, grief, remorse, even a troubled satisfaction. And the cinematographer, Vilmos Zsigmond, operates at the summit of his powers: the final shot of a barn has the quiet confidence of a classic still-life.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; May 27-28.)

HOT FUZZ

A worthy successor to "Shaun of the Dead," though not a sequel. That dealt with zombies in London; this, even more forbiddingly, deals with the British rural classes, hell-bent on preserving their way of life. Simon Pegg (who co-wrote the script) stars as Nicholas Angel, an ambitious policeman consigned, for his own good, to a blameless country town, where he pairs up with an overweight local officer, Danny Butterman (Nick Frost), to chase shoplifters and swans. Needless to say, there are darker crimes to come, and the partners are finally drawn into deafening shoot-outs and high-speed chases—all the paraphernalia of the American cop movies to which Danny is so devoted. Edgar Wright's movie, generous with its gags, doesn't so much spoof the action-thriller genre as pay it prolonged homage, in the most inappropriate of settings; along the way, it finds time to anatomize, as did "Shaun of the Dead," the peculiar lusts and lunacies of modern England—or, at least, that part of it which tries to wish modernity away.—*A.L.* (4/30/07) (In wide release.)

SHREK THE THIRD

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

SPIDER-MAN 3

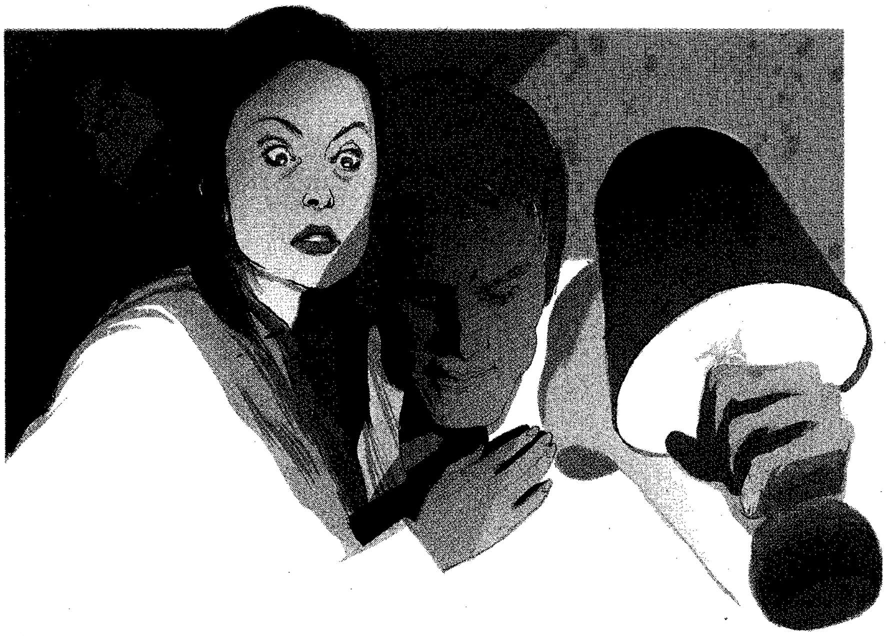
The third and least of the series so far. Tobey Maguire, looking ever more costive and uncomfortable, returns as Peter Parker, who finds himself doubly transformed—first, into the crime-busting arachnid whom we know and revere, and, second, into a black-suited alternative who revels in violence and, for some unknown reason, keeps breaking into dance moves. He is paired with a distracted Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst) and, briefly and more entertainingly, with Gwen Stacy (Bryce Dallas Howard), who looks like a villain waiting to happen. For the moment, we have to make do with a couple of dullards: the New Goblin (James Franco), warmed up from the previous films, and Venom (Topher Grace), a frustrated hack consumed by an extraterrestrial compound. All this is orchestrated by the director, Sam Raimi, with a halting, scattershot approach that verges on panic. The only person to emerge from the wreckage with any credit is Thomas Haden Church, who finds a grainy, melancholic streak in the unstoppable Sandman.—*A.L.* (5/7/07) (In wide release.)

28 WEEKS LATER

This sequel to the more effective horror film "28 Days Later" takes that film's premise (Londoners infected with a virus become rabid zombies) and wraps it in heavy-handed metaphor. It seems that after the "rage" disease has burned itself out a bit, a would-be Green Zone is made in the heart of London, and reconstruction, under U.S. leadership, begins. When the infection returns, there are all sorts of dramatic parallels to Iraq foreign policy, including equating raging zombies with Muslim terrorists. In a film where U.S. military might is more menacing than flesh-eating zombies, there's little to cheer for. The director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo races the film along, blurring the lines between good and evil and delivering a stultifying polemic that kills the thrills.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

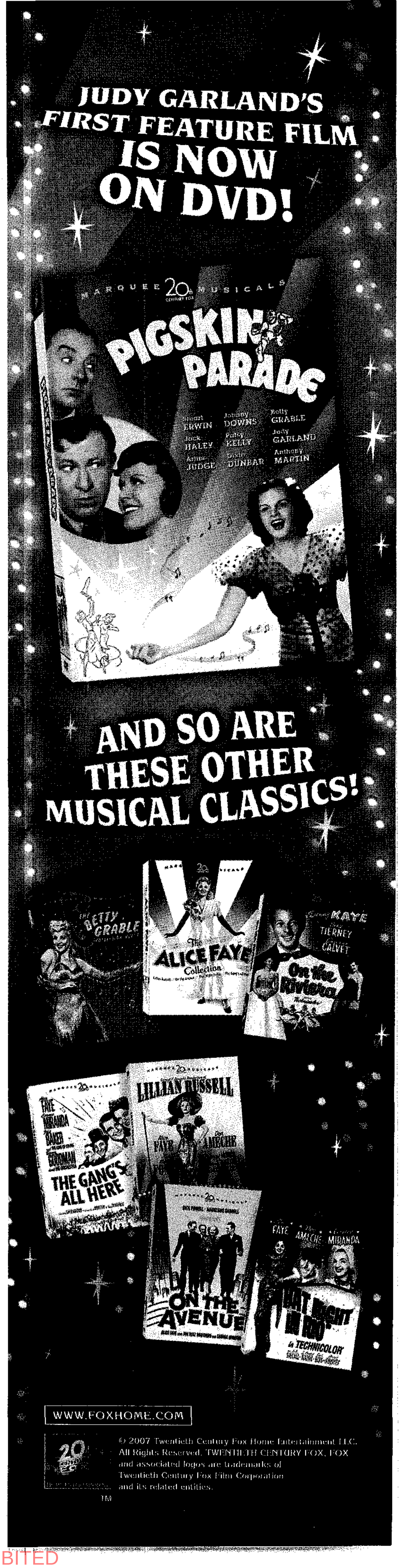
WAITRESS

Adrienne Shelly wrote and directed this winning comedy (sadly, her last), starring Keri Russell as Jenna, a small-town waitress and expert pie baker married to a freakishly controlling husband (Jeremy Sisto). When, to Jenna's dismay, she gets pregnant, she drowns her sorrows by baking inventive desserts with names like Bad Baby Pie and begins a torrid affair with her handsome, bland gynecologist (Nathan Fillion). The able supporting cast includes Andy Griffith (as the curmudgeonly diner owner), Cheryl Hines and Shelly (as Jenna's sparky waitress friends), and Eddie Jemison (as a nerdy suitor), and Russell conveys Jenna's bleak world with a pretty, expressionless face. Shelly



"Bug," directed by William Friedkin, based on a play by Tracy Letts, opens May 25.

FRANK STOCKTON



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deftly achieves a tone pitched between fantasy and reality, its levity belying an astute and humane study of an unhappy relationship steeped in inertia.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

THE WENDELL BAKER STORY
What is the collective noun for the Wilson brothers? A relaxation of Wilsons? They're all here, clubbing together to create so blatant a throwback to the nineteen-seventies that any viewer not wearing a floral shirt may be refused entry to the screening. Directed by Luke and Andrew Wilson, the movie stars Luke as Wendell Baker, a groundless optimist from Texas, who has an unsteady girlfriend (Eva Mendes), a dog, and not much else. After a spell in jail, he goes to work at a retirement home, where the head nurse (Owen Wilson) is making life hell for some of the crusty customers (Harry Dean Stanton, Seymour Cassel, and Kris Kristofferson) and thus asking for revenge. The film is lazy, loose, inoffensive, shot through with occasional sadness, and all but ruined by an ending of spectacular wrongness. Will Ferrell punctures the mood with a cameo of surprising comic ferocity.—*A.L.* (5/21/07) (In wide release.)

THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR
François Truffaut, the director of "The Man Who Loved Women," loved women, and cited his own tangled relationship with Catherine Deneuve as the basis for this 1981 melodrama about love unto madness. The story concerns Bernard (Gérard Depardieu), a young paterfamilias who lives in suburban comfort outside Grenoble with his wife and child. When a couple move into the empty house next door, his placid existence is overturned: eight years earlier, he and Mathilde (Fanny Ardant), one of the new neighbors, had had a furious, unresolved affair, and their lust is instantly reignited. If Truffaut disguises his own experiences in the two couples' bourgeois simplicity (Bernard trains tanker captains, Mathilde's husband is an air-traffic controller), he leaves his passions fearsomely exposed. Depardieu does what he does best as a barely domesticated beast of desire, and Truffaut's camera loves Ardant, with her quasi-martial bearing, deep gaze, and calm mystery. Truffaut loved Ardant, too; this fierce drama made her a star and made the director and the star a couple. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; May 29.)

Also Playing

BRAND UPON THE BRAIN!: In wide release. **THE EX:** In wide release. **FLANDERS:** IFC Center. **GEORGIA RULE:** In wide release. **ONCE:** In wide release. **SIX DAYS:** Quad Cinema.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New Filmmakers Presents." May 23 at 9:35: "Rigodon" (2005, Sari Dalena; in Filipino, English, and Tagalog). ♦ In première. May 25 and May 28-29 at 6:30 and 9:15 and May 26-27 at 3:30, 6:30, and 9:15: "Magic Mirror" (2005, Manoel de Oliveira; in Portuguese). ♦ Special screenings. May 24 at 8: "All Circuits On," video art from 1969 to 1979. ♦ May 25 at 8: "Necropolis" (1970, Franco Brocani). ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 26 at 5:30: Short films, including "In the Street" (1952, Helen Levitt). ♦ May 26 at 7: "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" (1969, Ken Jacobs). ♦ May 27 at 4: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ May 27 at 7:30: Short films, including "Ménilmontant" (1924-25, Dimitri Kirsanoff; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"DanceAfrica." May 23-24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bamako" (2006, Abderrahmane Sissako; in French and Bambara). ♦ May 25 and May 28 at 2 and 4:30 and May 26-27 at 2: "Kirikou and the Wild Beasts" (2006, Michel Ocelot; in French). ♦ May 25 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Don't F*** With Me, I Have 51 Brothers and Sisters" (2004, Dumisani Phakathi; in English and Zulu). ♦ May 26 at 4:30: "The 11th Hour" (2006, Zelalem W/Mariam; in Amharic). ♦ May 26 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Night of Truth" (2004, Fanta Régina Nacro; in Dioula, French, and Moore). ♦ May 27 at 4:30: "A Child's Love Story" (2004, Ben Diogaye Beye; in French). ♦ May 27 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Daughter of Keltoum" (2001, Mehdi Charef; in French and Arabic).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Documentaries by Werner Herzog, plus films of his choice. May 23 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40 and May 24 at 1 and 4:20: "I Am My Films" (1979, Christian Weisenborn and Erwin Keusch). ♦ May 23 at 2:50, 6:10, and 9:30 and May 24 at 2:50 and 6:10: "The Ball Is a Scumbag" (2000, Weisenborn and Rudolph Herzog). ♦ May 24 at 8: "Jag Mandir" (1991). ♦ May 25 at 1:30, 4:30, and 7:30: "Echoes from a Somber Empire" (1990). ♦ May 25 at 3:20, 6:20, and 9:20: "Wodaabe—Herdsmen of the Sun" (1989). ♦ May 26 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck?" (1976). ♦ May 27 at 1:45, 3:40, 5:35, 7:30, and 9:25: "Bells from the Deep" (1993). ♦ May 28 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "Animal Love" (1995, Ulrich Seidl). ♦ May 28 at 3:10 and 7:25: "Darwin's Nightmare" (2004, Hubert Sauper). ♦ May 29 at 1, 3:50, 6:40, and 9:30: "Vernon, Florida" (1981, Errol Morris). ♦ May 29 at 2:10, 5, and 7:50: "Gates of Heaven" (1978, Morris).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Fanny Ardant. May 29 at 12:30 and 7: "The Woman Next Door" (†). ♦ May 29 at 4 and 9: "Confidentially Yours" (1983, François Truffaut; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. May 25-28 at noon: "Walkabout" (1971, Nicholas Roeg). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 25-27: "Grey Gardens" (1976, Ellen Hovde, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Muffie Meyer).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." May 23 at 6: "Earth" (1930, Alexander Dovzhenko; silent). ♦ May 23 at 8 and May 24 at 6: "A Bill of Divorcement" (1932, George Cukor). ♦ May 24 at 8 and May 25 at 6: "Cat People" (1942, Jacques Tourneur). ♦ May 25 at 8 and May 27 at 2: "The Band Wagon" (1953, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ May 27 at 4:30 and May 28 at 6: "The Hired Hand" (†). ♦ The films of Allan King. May 23 at 6:30, May 24 at 6, May 25 at 7:30, May 26 at 2, May 27 at 4:30, and May 28 at 5: "Dying at Grace" (2003). ♦ May 27 at 2: "Memory for Max, Claire, Ida and Company" (2005). ♦ May 28 at 8: "Six War Years" (1975) and short films.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Samuel Fuller. May 26 at 2: "China Gate" (1957). ♦ May 26 at 4: "Run of the Arrow" (1957). ♦ May 26-27 at 6:30: "Forty Guns" (1957). ♦ May 27 at 2: "Verboten!" (1958). ♦ May 27 at 4: "The Crimson Kimono" (1959).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. May 23-24 at 7, May 25 at 7 and 9 and May 26-29 at 5 and 9: "Orange Winter" (2007, Andrei Zagdansky).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 25 at 9: "Paris, Texas" (1984, Wim Wenders).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The films of Lee Marvin. May 23 at 1:30: "The Dirty Dozen" (1967, Robert Aldrich). ♦ May 23 at 4:15 and 8:30: "The Killers" (1964, Don Siegel). ♦ May 24 at 8: "The Professionals" (1966, Richard Brooks). ♦ Four films by John Schlesinger. May 25 at 1:30 and 6:30: "Billy Liar" (1963). ♦ May 25 at 3:30 and May 26 at 6: "Day of the Locust" (1975). The May 26 screening will be introduced by William Atherton. ♦ May 25 at 8:30 and May 26 at 3:45: "Midnight Cowboy" (1969). The May 25 screening will be introduced by Sylvia Miles. The May 26 screening will be introduced by the cinematographer Adam Holender. ♦ May 26 at 1:30 and 9: "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (1971). ♦ Special screenings. May 27-29 at 3 and 7: "Barry Lyndon" (1975, Stanley Kubrick).

POP NOTES
ALPHA DOGG

PATRICK LONG

In 1970, after more than a decade in the record business as a producer for Atlantic Records and then, briefly, as a recording artist, Jerry Williams took the stage name Swamp Dogg and released "Total Destruction to Your Mind," a crazed, brilliant blast of protest soul that compared favorably with the best work of Sly Stone, Curtis Mayfield, and Funkadelic. Over the next few years, Williams proved himself to be a superb singer, a talented arranger, a gonzo songwriter, and a genuine eccentric—the cover art of the second Swamp Dogg album showed him riding a giant white rat—but sales were poor, and his recorded output tapered off. And then, this spring, with no fanfare—how could there be?—came **"Resurrection"** (Swamp Dogg), which is exactly what the title says, a rousing return to form by one of soul music's greatest cult artists.

The album opens with swirling percussion, stabbing horns, and a passionate series of questions: "In time of war, who wins? / When you choose sides, how do you distinguish your friends?" The song goes on to mention blood, burials, and body bags before chucking the whole nasty business and appealing heavenward with repeated cries of "Help us, Lord." It's an exhilarating and exhausting experience, and it's only the first of many. "America Is Bleeding" takes on abortion, immigration, poverty, and more in a decidedly untidy four minutes. And the twelve-minute title track is even more expository, with a long spoken-word section that excoriates Congress over the legislative (as opposed to Constitutional) handling of voting rights. All of this would be overwhelming were it not for Swamp Dogg's mastery of the soul form. "They Crowned an Idiot King" has a lovely and haunting melody and a churchy organ solo. And there are even a few romantic moments. "Today I Got Married" is a jaunty and highly idiosyncratic celebration of nuptial bliss ("She's just like Wal-Mart when it comes to loving / She's got everything I need"). "Love Song 4 U" borrows Princely spelling conventions but is otherwise a highly traditional ballad, right down to the impossible, Howard Tate-style high note at the song's close. It's good to have Swamp Dogg back, even if there's no telling how long he'll stick around.

—*Ben Greenman*

READINGS AND TALKS

192 BOOKS
Miranda July, the performance artist who rose from art-house obscurity to Sundance darling two years ago with her film "Me and You and Everyone We Know" reads from her début fiction collection, "No One Belongs Here More Than You." (Paula Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. May 22 at 7.)

HAPPY ENDING MUSIC AND READING SERIES
On the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, the curator, Amanda Stern, organizes programs mandating that writers and musicians "take one public risk" (such as reading one's PIN numbers or playing a tricky cover song). On May 23 at 8, the writers Matthew Sharpe, Cris Beam, and Amy Fusselman and the musician Block accept the challenge. (Happy Ending Lounge, 302 Broome St. No tickets necessary.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Rebecca Mead, who is on the staff of this magazine, joins the journalist and humor writer Henry Alford for a discussion of her new book, "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding." (South Court Auditorium, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-868-4444. May 24 at 7.)

RITALIN READING SERIES
Comedy scribes compress their prose into performances that cannot exceed four minutes. Adam Lowitt ("The Daily Show"), Jon Friedman ("The Rejection Show"), Alex Blagg ("Best Week Ever"), and others take the stage on May 24 at 7:30. (Mo Pitkin's House of Satisfaction, 34 Avenue B, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. 212-777-5660.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

DOWNTOWN ARTS
The Lower East Side Festival of the Arts brings together more than a hundred and fifty downtown performers—from puppeteers and poets to actors and acrobats—at the Theatre for the New City for three days of free music, art, dance, and more. (155 First Ave., between 9th and 10th Sts. No tickets necessary. May 25-27. For a complete schedule, visit www.theaterforthenewcity.net.)

UPTOWN ARTS
A two-day family festival at the Cloisters features animal-themed workshops, in English and Spanish. The events include a search for creatures depicted in the Cloisters' collection of medieval art and a falconry demonstration. (Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2280. May 26-27.)

MORE DOWNTOWN ARTS
Antony Edward Zito, a local artist and raw-food devotee, attempts to paint a hundred watercolor portraits in a twenty-four-hour period. His breaks will be no longer than fifteen minutes, which is just a bit more time than he'll have for each painting. Interested parties can register to have their portrait done, for a fee, by e-mailing zitozone@yahoo.com. The event benefits the forthcoming documentary film "Raw for 30 Days," which is about a group of diabetics and their attempts to improve their health. (GalleryBar, 120 Orchard St. May 23, starting at 8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
In the wake of the blockbuster sales of Impressionist and contemporary art, the city's auction circuit settles down for a week of solid, tasteful offerings. **Christie's** begins with a sale of American historical documents from the collection of Malcolm Forbes and an auction of wine, both on May 22, followed by a sale of pre-Columbian art on May 23. An Art Deco silver and silver-gilt dinner service in sleekly geometrical designs by the French designer Jean Puiforcat—once the property of a Brazilian diplomat—is among the most striking lots at the house's auction of English, Continental, and American silver later the same day. A sale of American art (May 24), featuring works by Cassatt, Sargent, Hartley, and Andrew Wyeth, rounds out the week. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ American paintings are in the spotlight at **Sotheby's** as well, in a sale (May 23) featuring a characteristically serene image by Rockwell of a sailor on leave, happily dozing on a garden hammock, as well as a typically radiant romantic landscape by Bierstadt. The following day (May 24) is devoted to French and American furniture. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Phillips** offers one of its high-powered design sales (May 24), at which one can acquire a genuine Paris Métro entrance, by the Art Nouveau genius Hector Guimard. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.) ♦ Dr. John M. Levinson—past president of the Explorers Club and onetime ship's surgeon on Russian icebreakers—puts his collection of polar artifacts and books up for auction at **Swann** on May 24. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

Doug Grissom's new play, "Elvis People."

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
OUT OF THE CLOSET
June 1-18

MOMA's fifth "To Save and Project" series offers restorations, rediscoveries, and New York premières of a wide range of classic films, including Andy Warhol's "Chelsea Girls" and John Cassavetes's "Faces." (212-708-9480.)

THE THEATRE
ALL SHOOK UP
June 6

Long before there was *Us* magazine and "Access Hollywood," Elvis Presley was a national obsession. The playwright Doug Grissom delves into the strange world of the King and his effect on American culture with his new play, "Elvis People," at New World Stages. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
SUNNY SOUNDS
June 8

SummerStage returns to Central Park as the English soul phenom Joss Stone and the Chicago rapper Common make an appearance to benefit the mostly free concert series. The gratis shows begin a week later with the jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson. (www.summerstage.org.)

ART
WITHIN REACH
June 14-17

More than eighty galleries from around the world will show at the annual Affordable Art Fair, which comes to the Metropolitan Pavilion and the adjoining Altman Building (125 W. 18th St.) next month. Affordability is, of course, in the eye of the spender, but in the current art market, the price range—$100 to $10,000—is decidedly modest. (212-255-2003.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE
June 21

The boundaries between classical, world music, and pop will melt away during "Make Music New York," a citywide, daylong festival of more than six hundred free concerts that will be held simultaneously with similar events in most of the major cities of the world. The acts are too numerous to list, but the festival's Web site includes an elaborate interactive map. (For more information, see www.makemusicny.org.)

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THE NEW YORKER

Festival

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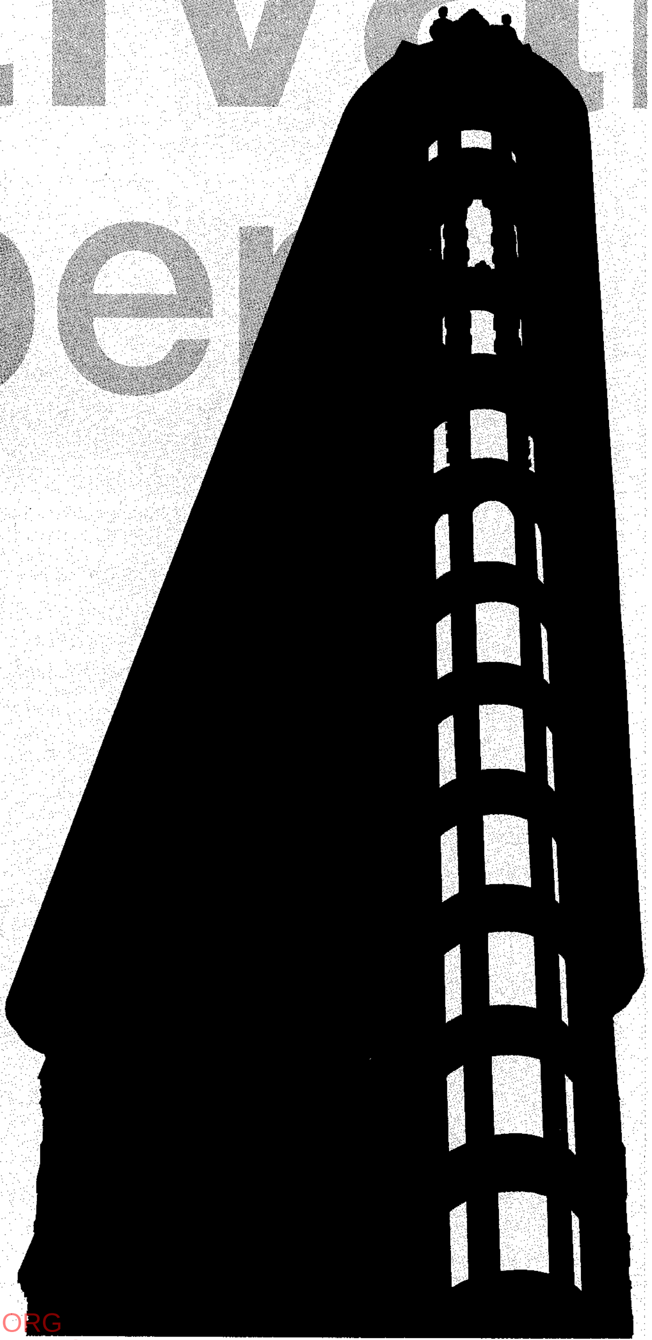
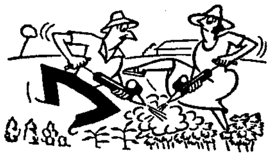


THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HUMAN NATURE



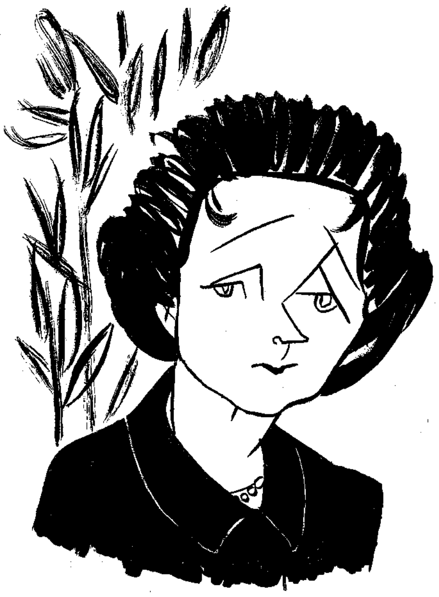
The red imported fire ant, or *Solenopsis invicta*, is about an eighth of an inch long, with a ruddy-brown body covered in tiny hairs. It feeds mainly on other insects, but will eat just about anything—including electrical equipment—and is reportedly drawn to dirty laundry. A mature colony can contain as many as two hundred and forty thousand individuals and every year produces several hundred potential queens. These queens mate just once, during their "nuptial flight," then snap off their wings and find a suitable site to start a new colony.

Native to South America, red imported fire ants probably arrived in the United States in cargo ships that docked in Mobile, Alabama, sometime in the nineteen-thirties. By the late forties, they had spread into Florida and Mississippi; by the early fifties, they could be found as far away as Arkansas and North Carolina. Wherever new colonies appeared, trouble followed. The ants attacked young plants and animals, and in humans their bites produced a painful sting accompanied by white pustules. Their mounds, which grew as high as two feet, reduced agricultural yields and damaged farm equipment.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Among those who watched the progress of the ants with horror were officials at the United States Department of Agriculture. In 1957, the department decided to eradicate the insects. Its weapons of choice were the pesticides heptachlor and dieldrin, both of which concentrate as they move up the food chain. In 1958, a million acres were sprayed. Quail, woodcocks, wild turkeys, blackbirds, meadowlarks, opossums, and armadillos all began dying off. The U.S.D.A. responded by denying that there was a problem and continuing to spray.

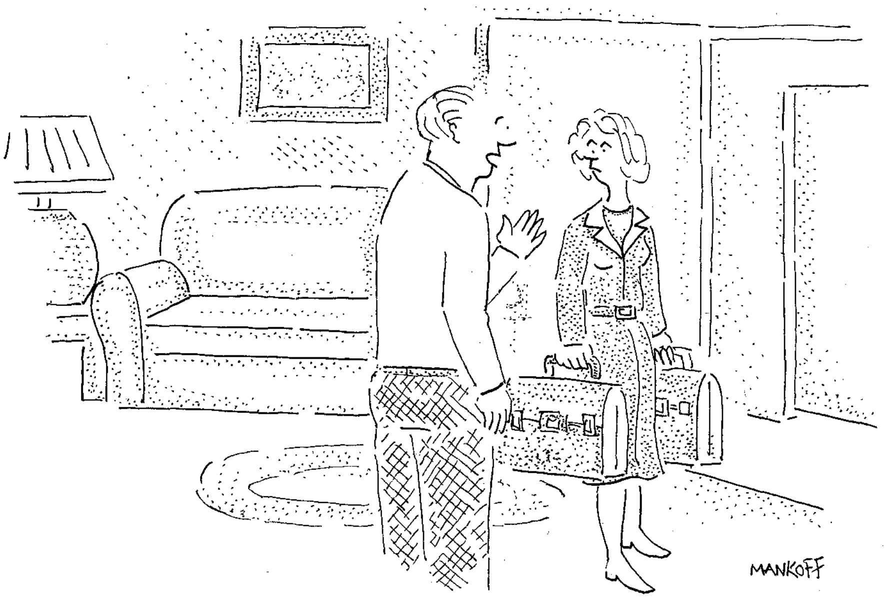
Among those who watched the progress of the U.S.D.A. with horror was Rachel Carson. She concluded that the department had never investigated the pesticides' toxicity or, if it had, had ignored the results. (Heptachlor is suspected to cause liver damage, and dieldrin is a neurotoxin.) The department seemed equally clueless about the basic biology of the ants, which continued to spread even as the chemicals rained down. The war against the fire ants was, in Carson's words, "an outstanding example of an ill-conceived, badly executed, and thoroughly detrimental experiment in the mass control of insects"; it became one of the inspirations for her book "Silent Spring."



Carson was born a hundred years ago this Sunday—on May 27, 1907—in the town of Springdale, Pennsylvania, just outside Pittsburgh. As a child, she fell in love with the sea, although she had never seen it. She went on to earn a master's degree in zoology from Johns Hopkins, and became the author of several works about ocean life, including "The Sea Around Us," which won a National Book Award in 1952. "Silent Spring," much of which was first published in this magazine, came out in 1962. It was her last work; she died, of breast cancer, eighteen months after it appeared.

As much as any book can, "Silent Spring" changed the world by describing it. An immediate best-seller, the book launched the modern environmental movement, which, in turn, led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, the passage of the Clean Air, the Clean Water, and the Endangered Species Acts, and the banning of a long list of pesticides, including dieldrin. Depending on how you look at it, Carson's centenary couldn't come at a better time—or a worse one.

Six years into the Bush Administration,



"Hey! How about giving me some benchmarks?"

• •

it's basically the ant wars all over again. At key agencies, a disregard for inconvenient evidence seems to be a prerequisite. A memo prepared by the Democratic staff of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in mid-March, for example, revealed that officials of the White House Council on Environmental Quality had made more than a hundred and eighty changes to a status report on global warming, virtually all of which had the effect of exaggerating scientific uncertainties and minimizing certainties. (The official responsible for most of the changes, Philip Cooney, had come to the White House from the American Petroleum Institute and now works for Exxon Mobil.) A report by the Inspector General for the Department of the Interior, also issued in March, chronicled numerous instances in which a high-ranking department official, Julie MacDonald, had pressured government scientists to alter findings on threatened species. MacDonald, the report pointedly noted, had "no formal educational background in natural sciences, such as biology." (She has since resigned.) As it happened, the report on MacDonald was released right around the time that the former second-in-command at the Interior Department, J. Steven Griles, pleaded guilty to lying to Congress.

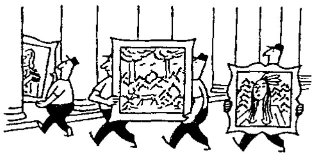
Meanwhile, the Administration has done its best to gut the safeguards put in place after "Silent Spring." When, for instance, the E.P.A. proposed new rules on mercury emissions from power plants, the proposal turned out to contain several paragraphs lifted, virtually verbatim, from an industry lobbyist's memos. (With minor changes, those regulations are now in effect.) Just last month, the Administration proposed new rules on the retrofitting of old power plants. The more or less explicit purpose of the rules is to accommodate a power company, Duke Energy, that the E.P.A. had itself sued for violating the Clean Air Act. Also last month, the E.P.A. announced that it would once again delay taking action on two drinking-water contaminants, perchlorate, an ingredient of rocket fuel, and MTBE, a fuel additive.

Though it seems safe to say that Carson would have found all this appalling, she probably wouldn't have been surprised. Before devoting herself full time to writing, Carson spent seventeen years working for the federal government, at the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, now the Fish and Wildlife Service. She knew how bureaucracies function—or don't—and was well aware of how easily they can be manipulated. (In "Silent Spring" she cites a pesticide trade publication welcoming the fire-ant eradication program as a "sales bonanza.")

And while Carson clearly hoped that her book would make a difference, this hope was balanced by doubt. Her immediate topic was pesticides, but her deeper subject was human arrogance—the delusion that altering the world means controlling it. For the U.S.D.A., killing quail, woodcocks, wild turkeys, blackbirds, meadowlarks, opossums, and armadillos was not a problem. The problem was stopping the fire ants. They now infest some three hundred and thirty million acres and can be found as far west as California.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

CONTENT DEPT.
CHARLES IN CHARGE



The art dealer Charles Saatchi spends a lot of time sitting at his desk. You might, too, if your desk were more of a table, capacious enough to occupy almost an entire wall of a parlor-floor room in your Belgravia town house; if its placement allowed you to hear snatches of birdsong and to look onto leafy Eaton Square; if its surface were laden with monographs, notebooks, a pewter platter of cookies, several bright-colored plastic cigarette lighters, and a Mrs. Potato Head toy.

In the midst of this tableau, Saatchi's computer, a black flat-screen desktop, occupies a clutter-free zone toward the front. In the past, he didn't use it much—"I can Google things up, and that's about the extent of it," he said—but, lately, he has been spending three hours a day pecking away at his gallery's ever-expanding Web site. "This site happened only because I had nothing to do," Saatchi, who is sixty-three, said. He has been waiting almost a year for the construction of a new gallery in London, and, in the meantime, he explained, the young people in his life suggested that he stake a claim on the Internet. "Oh, yes, I see, this is the modern world," he recalled, of his awakening. "I was kicked by my staff, who said, 'Oy, wake up,' and by my daughters, who called me a double loser," he said, splaying both thumbs and forefingers into L-shapes, and smacking them against his forehead.

A year ago, Saatchi launched Your Gallery, a free online forum where anyone in the world can create a profile page and display his or her art work. “I’m hoping that the site is encouraging to people who find the art world a little daunting,” he said. Within a month, thirteen hundred artists had signed up, and Saatchi followed with STUART, a spinoff page focussing on student artists. Next came a magazine, a street-art gallery, a debate forum, and Showdown, a biweekly contest at the end of which two pieces of art are voted on by viewers. “We stole Showdown from the most fantastic site, Hot or Not—the one where you put people up and say, ‘Would you or wouldn’t you?’ ” Saatchi said. “We think of something, and we just stick another box on,” he went on, stubbing a Silk Cut cigarette into a silver chalice.

By January, the online galleries were drawing more than five million hits a day, but Saatchi noticed a problem: a quorum of artists from China were attempting to communicate with their English-speaking contemporaries, without much luck. Saatchi tried an automatic translation service, but the results were spotty: a section that ought to have read “New Art from China,” for instance, was interpreted as “New Art from Porcelain.” Saatchi said, “That’s what makes Chinese translating systems so frustrating—the language comes out as gobbledygook.” An improved Mandarin site went live last month.

“I don’t do business travel,” Saatchi said, announcing his intention to create similar sites for speakers of Russian, Hindi, Japanese, and Spanish. “I haven’t been to America in five years. I’m very good at feigning terrible wasting diseases at the last minute. Nigella”—Saatchi is married to the cook and writer Nigella Lawson—“gave me this great thing where if you’re in the middle of a phone call it makes the noise of a baby or a deliveryman.” When he launched Your Gallery, Saatchi pledged, in the name of giving others a chance, to desist for a year from buying artists he discovered there. The year is almost up. “I’ve got a list of people I think are very, very good,” he said. “It fills up two sides of an A4 envelope.”

Lawson, wearing an apron, popped in and said, “Can I get you anything?”

“Hello, darling, what are you up to?” Saatchi responded.

“It’s a madhouse in here,” Lawson said, and explained that she was doing a photo shoot downstairs. Nevertheless, she gamely agreed to give a demonstration on her Pilates machine for a curious visitor. “I need my stirrups!” she yelled to Saatchi, who was happy to help.

—*Lauren Collins*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
LADIES!

“Hello! I’m your hostess!” Cindy Adams was saying as she stood in the entryway of her Park Avenue apartment, welcoming a small group of women to a ladies’ tea for Marianne Williamson, the New Age author, and Ellen Burstyn, the actress and memoirist. Adams did not know all her guests, since the party had been conceived in Burstyn’s public-relations office rather than in the generous heart of New York’s saltiest gossip columnist, but she struck a note of instant intimacy.

“Can I tell you, these crappy dogs just cost me nine hundred dollars to do their teeth, and that’s with the fifteen-per-cent discount the vet gave me?” Adams asked, as her two Yorkies, Jazzy and Juicy, swirled around her feet in a brown-and-black blur, before disappearing behind a concealed door into the kitchen. The apartment, she explained, had belonged to Doris Duke before Adams and her late husband, Joey, bought it, a decade ago, and while its silk-upholstered walls and lavish chinoiserie reflected Adams’s taste, a few traces of Duke remained. These included a black vinyl ceiling in the living room, embedded with spotlights (“She had fluorescents; I have Lalique,” Adams said), and a large ceramic bathtub, used by Adams as a storage space for old magazines. The bathtub was behind another of the apartment’s concealed doors, which Adams flung open to reveal her combined dressing room and office, the walls and ceiling of which were covered with laminated tabloid front pages displaying Adams’s scoops.

“The apartment is huge, but I live in this room and the kitchen—don’t we all live in one room?” she said. One of the guests, Gloria Vanderbilt, nodded in agreement, whereupon Adams complimented her on her blouse. “It’s from Takashimaya,” Vanderbilt said. “They have a sleeveless one like it.”

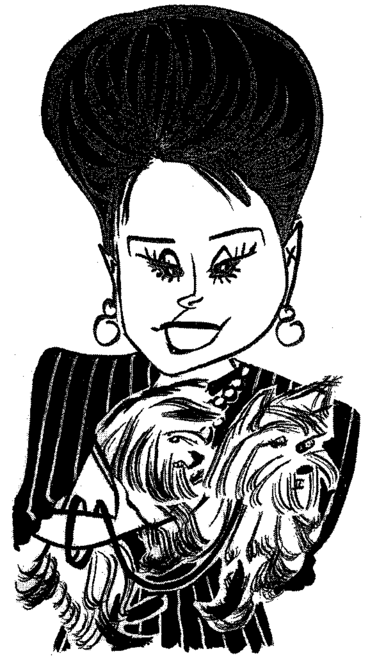
“I don’t even take a shower in sleeveless anymore,” Adams replied.

Burstyn, who was to appear that evening at the 92nd Street Y with Williamson, stood under Duke’s black ceiling and explained that her memoir, “Lessons in Becoming Myself,” concerned her life’s spiritual journey. “I’m a Sufi,” she explained, with a beneficent smile. “I like the expression ‘I am one cell in the mind of God.’ ” Elizabeth Gilbert, the author of the best-selling memoir “Eat, Pray, Love,” was telling Parker Posey that she had recently bought an eighteenth-century Presbyterian church in New Jersey to live in. “It’s very Yankee, with fifteen-foot wavy-glass windows,” Gilbert said, before adding that Julia Roberts had signed on to star in the movie version of her book. Gilbert said that she had asked her sister, a historian, whether she should beware of ghosts: “She said, ‘Presbyterians won’t bother you, with your yoga and your Buddhas and your cursing. It’s not like they’re Methodists.’ ”

“I’m a yogi, and I meditate,” said April Kramer, who has been married to Joey Kramer, the drummer for Aerosmith, for twenty-eight years—“One of the original wives,” she said—and who was wearing on a chain around her neck a diamond-studded white-gold peace symbol. “The women I know are all gravitating to a much more spiritual place,” Kramer said, at which her friend Myra Scheer, who raises money for the Rainforest Foundation Fund, laid her hand on a pearl peace-symbol pendant that she was wearing over her Dolce & Gabbana suit. “I went to a Kabbalah course, and it said that women have to bring light to men,” Scheer said. Among the men to whom Scheer had brought light was Billy Joel, who wore a pendant like hers onstage at the last Rainforest Foundation Fund benefit. “Though he didn’t wear pearls—he wore Swarovski crystals,” she said.

Out on Adams’s terrace, Kathy Freston, the author of “The One,” a guide to achieving love via vegetarianism, yoga, and other practices of enlightened living, was sitting with Wendi Murdoch. Freston, who is married to Tom Freston, one of the founders of MTV, had appeared on "Oprah," which she said caused her book to become Amazon's No. 1 bestseller. "I've been touched by the O," she said. Murdoch explained that she, Freston, and three other girlfriends had recently spent a week in St. Bart's aboard a yacht belonging to her husband, Rupert, absorbing the principles of Freston's book. "She corrupted us!" Murdoch said. "Vegetarian food, no drinking, no leather. She said we had to wear Payless shoes!" Murdoch said that, while she was not ready to give up meat, she had, under Freston's guidance, forsaken poultry. "I gave up birds forever, or until I can't stand it anymore," she said.

"When you give up a small animal, you save more animals," Freston said.



Cindy Adams with Jazzy and Juicy

Adams's attachment to her own small animals was clear: mid-party, she lay down on the marble tiles of her hallway and fed a pastry to Juicy from her mouth, a transfer requiring much licking and wagging from the canine party. Shortly afterward, Adams retreated to her tabloid-papered inner sanctum and, when asked if she considered herself a spiritual person, struck a note of uncharacteristic gravity. "I am somebody who is a seeker," she said. "There are two parts to every person. There's the brittle part that everybody sees. And then there's the part that would rather lie on the floor with the dog. The private part."

—*Rebecca Mead*

CLEAN PLATE CLUB
WEIGH-IN

Traditionally, dieting for a cause can be as good for one's figure as it is for the soul. Al Sharpton, during his hunger strike over Vieques, in 2001, dropped thirty pounds and several inches from his waistline. Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn's borough president, lost eleven pounds during his first Lighten Up Brooklyn campaign against obesity, in 2002. (He gained it all back.) The latest stunt-eating politico is Eric Gioia, a city councilman from Queens. Last week, he concluded a Food Stamp Challenge, during which he ate only what a New Yorker could typically afford on a week's worth of food stamps, or the equivalent of twenty-eight dollars.

"I did this to draw attention to the issue of how people are living in New York City," Gioia said the other day, in his parents' kitchen, in Woodside. "It's been terrible. I feel lousy. I'm tired. I just don't feel like myself." After three days, Gioia weighed in at a hundred and seventy-one pounds, up from his usual one-sixty-nine. In this respect, he resembled his college roommate Morgan Spurlock, who, while making his documentary "Super Size Me," ate nothing but McDonald's food for thirty days and acquired a soccer-ball gut.

Gioia's diet consisted primarily of pasta, white bread, vegetables, and tap water—the anti-Atkins. It followed a similar feat by the governor of Oregon, Ted Kulongoski, and coincided with attempts by four members of Congress to meet the same thrifty standards—all in the interest of raising awareness of the food-stamp program, which is up for reauthorization this year. President Bush has threatened to cut the program by hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several years, even though food-stamp provisions have not been properly adjusted for inflation since 1996.

Here are the groceries that Gioia brought home from a Food Dynasty in Woodside: two loaves of white bread, six ears of corn, five oranges, six bananas, three cucumbers, three cans of tuna, four packets of ramen, five boxes of Ronzoni pasta, one jar of tomato sauce, one bag of carrots (organic), one stick of butter, processed-cheese slices, one tub of pre-mixed peanut butter and jelly (Smucker's Goober). Total cost: $24.44. Feeling strong at the outset, he forgot to pace himself. For his first breakfast, he ate six pieces of toast, and for lunch he had three Goober sandwiches and a banana. After four days, he was out of bread, fruit, and cheese, and was also suffering from headaches, perhaps owing to caffeine withdrawal. (Governor Kulongoski spent four of his twenty-one dollars on coffee.) On the fifth day, Gioia returned to Food Dynasty to spend his final $3.56. "I got a good deal on English muffins," he said. He also found a three-for-a-dollar special on yogurt.

Gioia did not look for loopholes. For instance, he didn't scrounge free condiments at fast-food restaurants, as Homer Simpson might do. At the office, he drank water from the bathroom faucet rather than from the cooler. But public life has its snares, and during a gala at the Museum of Modern Art last Tuesday, after he waved away a plate of veal Milanese and asked for a glass of tap water, he inadvertently drank some Pellegrino—a violation he claims to have discovered only when the bubbles tickled his throat. He was seated next to David Childs, the architect, and gazed longingly at Childs's raspberry dessert. "These raspberries cost more than your whole week," Childs told him.

On the seventh day, Gioia prepared dinner for himself at his parents' house, using what provisions he had left: a sliver of butter, a bowl's worth of ziti, and six carrots. He peeled the carrots as his father, Neil, a florist, stood by. "I try to wait until he annoys me, and then I pull out a cupcake," Neil said.

"I've run out of tomato sauce," Councilman Gioia said as he mashed the butter on top of the cooked pasta and sat down to eat. He confessed that he'd scored some emergency bounty—granola bars, Ritz Bits—during a visit to a local soup kitchen the day before, and planned to save some for a special breakfast the next day on his way to Washington, where he was scheduled to meet with representatives of the Hunger Caucus. His mother and sister had promised to cook him chicken cutlets for dinner when he returned.

—*Ben McGrath*

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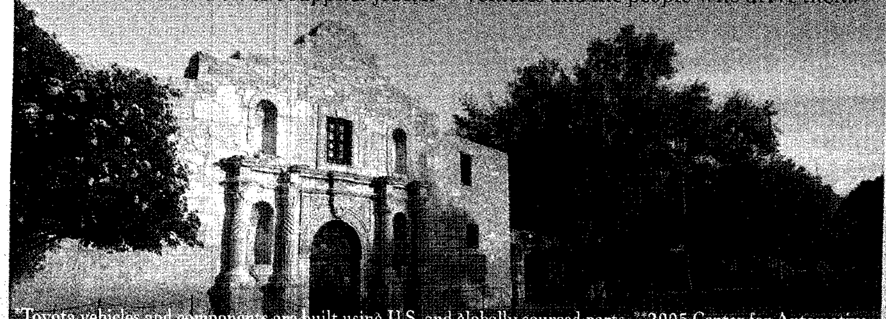

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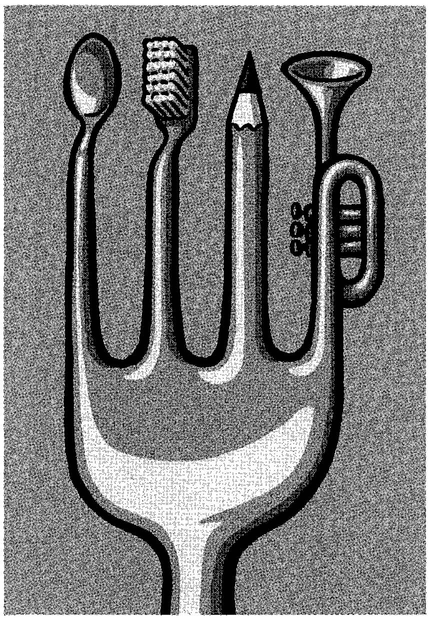
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
FEATURE PRESENTATION

Technology is supposed to make our lives easier, allowing us to do things more quickly and efficiently. But too often it seems to make things harder, leaving us with fifty-button remote controls, digital cameras with hundreds of mysterious features and book-length manuals, and cars with dashboard systems worthy of the space shuttle. This spiral of complexity, often called "feature creep," costs consumers time, but it also costs businesses money. Product returns in the U.S. cost a hundred billion dollars a year, and a recent study by Elke den Ouden, of Philips Electronics, found that at least half of returned products have nothing wrong with them. Consumers just couldn't figure out how to use them. Companies now know a great deal about problems of usability and consumer behavior, so why is it that feature creep proves unstoppable?

In part, feature creep is the product of the so-called internal-audience problem: the people who design and sell products are not the ones who buy and use them, and what engineers and marketers think is important is not necessarily what's best for consumers. Being technically savvy themselves, engineers love to enhance the capabilities of a product and give users more control and more options, particularly now that, thanks to digitization, lots of added features don't mean lots of added production costs. The engineers tend not to notice when more options make a product less usable. And marketing and sales departments see each additional feature as a new selling point, and a new way to lure customers. Often, the result is a product like Microsoft Word 2003, which has thirty-one toolbars and more than fifteen hundred commands.

You might think, then, that companies could avoid feature creep by just paying attention to what customers really want. But that's where the trouble begins, because although consumers find overloaded gadgets unmanageable, they also find them attractive. It turns out that when we look at a new product in a store we tend to think that the more features there are, the better. It's only once we get the product home and try to use it that we realize the virtues of simplicity. A recent study by a trio of marketing academics—Debora Viana Thompson, Rebecca W. Hamilton, and Roland T. Rust—found that when consumers were given a choice of three models, of varying complexity, of a digital device, more than sixty per cent chose the one with the most features. Then, when the subjects were given the chance to customize their product, choosing from twenty-five features, they behaved like kids in a candy store. (Twenty features was the average.) But, when they were asked to use the digital device, so-called "feature fatigue" set in. They became frustrated with the plethora of options they had created, and ended up happier with a simpler product.


CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

It seems odd that we don't anticipate feature fatigue and thus avoid it. But, as numerous studies have shown, people are not, in general, good at predicting what will make them happy in the future. As a result, we will pay more for more features because we systematically overestimate how often we'll use them. We also overestimate our ability to figure out how a complicated product works. A new study by Katherine A. Burson, a marketing professor at the University of Michigan, shows that, when we buy things like golf balls and digital cameras, we generally do a poor job of evaluating our skills, and so get stuck with unsuitable products. We're also willing to pay for extra options because we feel shortchanged if we don't have them. But, once we actually have a product, our patience with all those features runs out very quickly. Elke den Ouden found, for instance, that Americans who returned a product that was too complicated for them had spent, on average, just twenty minutes with it before giving up.

The fact that buyers want bells and whistles but users want something clear and simple creates a peculiar problem for companies. A product that doesn't have enough features may fail to catch our eye in the store. (A cell phone that doesn't offer a Bluetooth connection, for instance, may be dismissed as underpowered, even though relatively few Americans use Bluetooth headsets.) But a product with too many features is likely to annoy consumers and generate bad word of mouth, as BMW's original iDrive system did. Intended to give drivers unprecedented control over navigation, temperature, and entertainment through a single device, it was so hard to use that it has been described as "arguably the biggest corporate disaster" since New Coke.

There is no easy solution to this. You can try to make simplicity into a selling point, as Philips has done with its Sense and Simplicity campaign, or as Apple has done with the iPod. You can stratify the market, creating different products for different skill levels (as in the market for computer printers), although that may leave consumers bewildered at the sheer number of choices. In theory, the best strategy would be to make the complex simple, packaging all the power and the options consumers think they want into a design that they'll find easy to use. This is clearly what Apple believes it will be offering with the iPhone: a device with a remarkable range of features, coupled with an uncluttered touch-screen interface. It won't be surprising if the iPhone succeeds, but it would be understandable if it failed. The strange truth about feature creep is that even when you give consumers what they want they can still end up hating you for it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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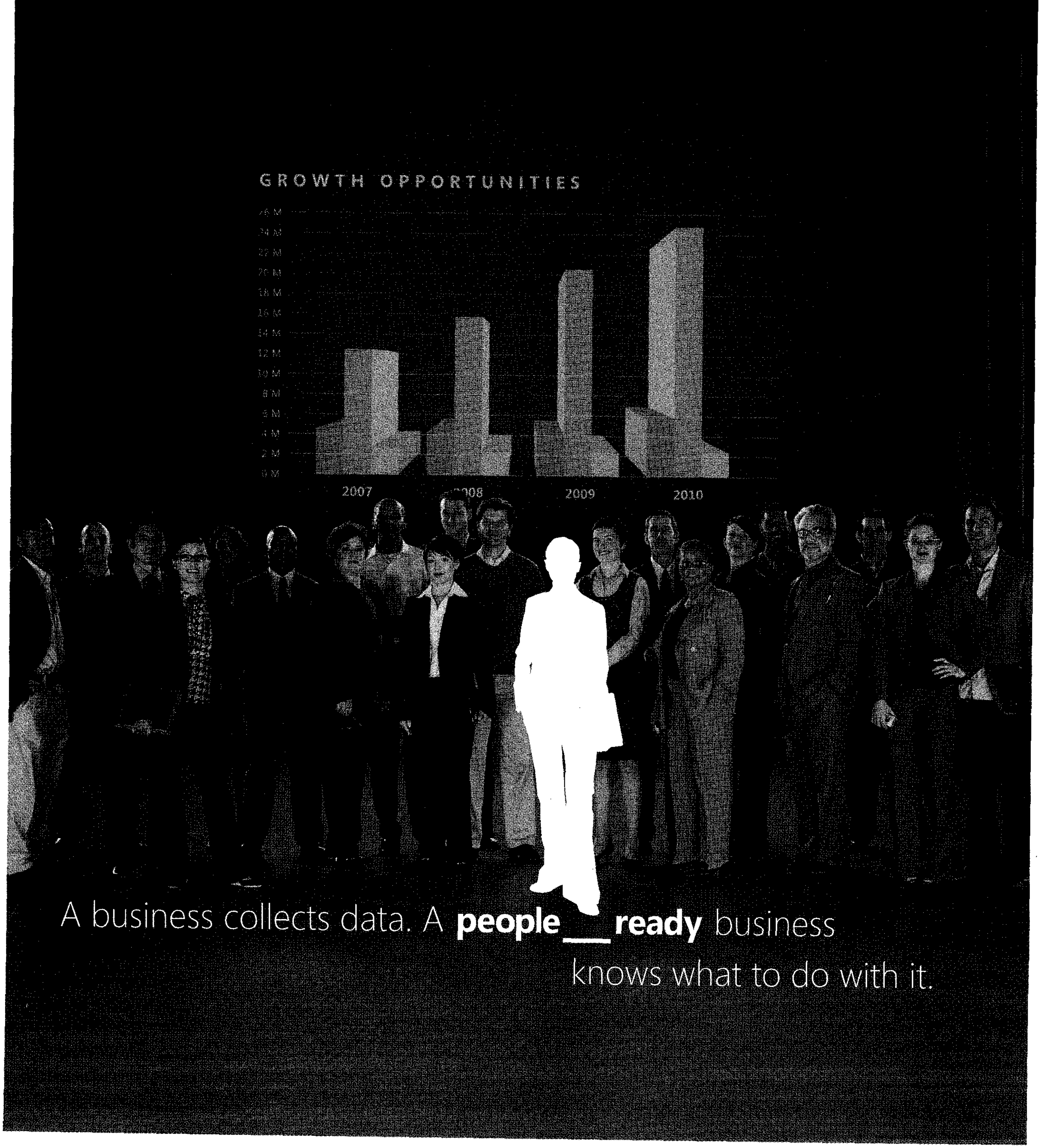
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ANNALS OF BIOGRAPHY

ANGELS AND AGES

Lincoln's language and its legacy.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

This all began on a very long plane ride, East Coast to West, when I was reading Doris Kearns Goodwin's "Team of Rivals," her book about Abraham Lincoln and his political competitors, and how, in the course of the Civil War, he turned them into a collegial Cabinet. It is a well-told, many-sided story, which attempts to give context to Lincoln without diminishing him, to place him among his peers and place him above them, too.

Coming to the end of the book, to the night of April 14, 1865, and Lincoln's assassination, I reached the words that were once engraved in every American mind. At 7:22 A.M., as Lincoln drew his last breath, all the worthies who had crowded into a little back bedroom in a boarding house across the street from Ford's Theatre turned to Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's formidable Secretary of War, for a final word. Stanton is the one with the long comic beard and the spinster's spectacles, who in the photographs looks a bit like Mr. Pickwick but was actually the iron man in the Cabinet, and who, after a difficult beginning, had come to revere Lincoln as a man and a writer and a politician—had even played something like watchful Horatio to his tragic Hamlet. Stanton stood still, sobbing, and then said, simply, "Now he belongs to the ages."

It's probably the most famous epitaph in American biography, and still perhaps the best; reading the words again, I felt a shiver. They seem perfectly chosen, in their bare and stoical evocation of a Lincoln who belongs to history alone, their invocation not of an assumption to an afterlife but of a long reign in the corridors of time, a man now part of eternity.

Overcome again by Lincoln's example—by the idea of a President who was at once an interesting mind, a tough customer, and a good writer—I decided to start reading the new Lincoln literature. It seemed to be multiplying by fission, as amoebas do, on the airport bookstore shelves. For the flight home, I picked up James L. Swanson's "Manhunt," a vivid account of the assassination and the twelve-day search for John Wilkes Booth that followed. Once again, I came to the deathbed scene, the vigil, the gathering. The Reverend Dr. Gurley, the Lincoln family minister, said, " 'Let us pray.' He summoned up . . . a stirring prayer. . . . Gurley finished and everyone murmured 'Amen.' Then, no one dared to speak. Again Stanton broke the silence. 'Now he belongs to the angels.' "

Now he belongs to the angels? Where had *that* come from? There was a Monty Python element here ("What was that? I think it was 'Blessed are the cheesemakers,' " the annoyed listeners too far from the Mount say to each other in "Life of Brian"), but was there something more going on? I flipped to the back of the book. In the endnotes, Swanson explained that his rendering was deliberately at variance with the scholarly consensus: "In my view, shared by Jay Winik, the most persuasive interpretation supports 'angels' and is also more consistent with Stanton's character and faith."

Well, that seemed circumspect enough. Even without having read Jay Winik, though, one could glimpse, just visible beneath the diaphanous middle of that endnote, the tracings of an ideological difference. Unlike Goodwin, a famous liberal, Swanson is a conservative legal scholar at the Heritage Foundation. And Stanton's words as they are normally quoted are (like the Lincoln Memorial) a form of American neoclassicism, at odds with the figure of Christian nobility prized by the right: Lincoln's afterlife lies not in Heaven but in his vindication by history. Does he belong to the angels or the ages? This small implicit dispute echoed, in turn, a genuine historical debate: between those historians who insist on a tough Lincoln, the Lincoln whom Edmund Wilson, in "Patriotic Gore," saw as an essentially Bismarckian figure—a cold-blooded nationalist who

#1 Book Sense Pick

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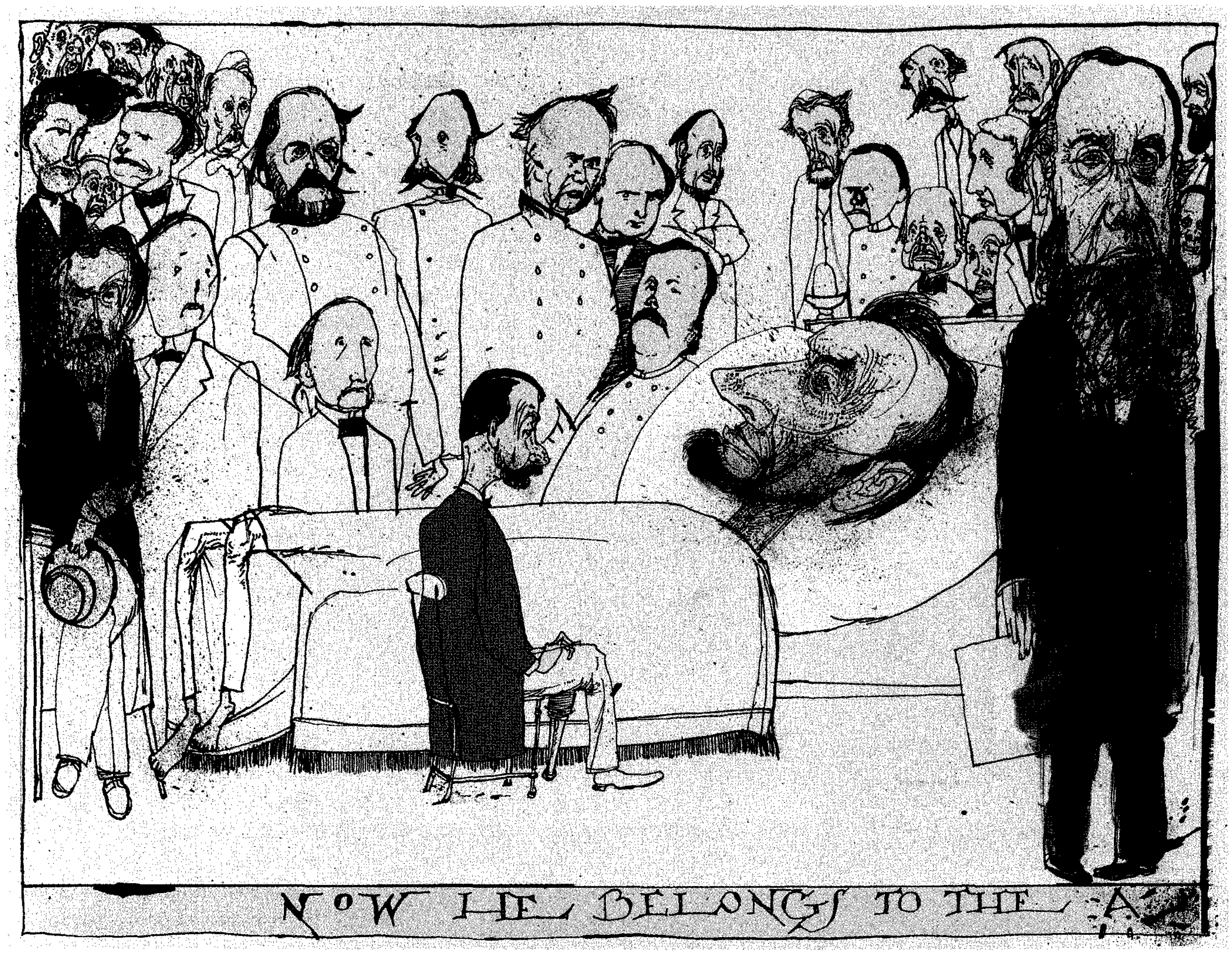
guaranteed the unity of the North American nation, a stoic emperor in a stovepipe hat whose essential drive was for power, his own and his country's—and those who, like Goodwin, see a tender, soulful Lincoln, a figure of almost saintly probity and patience who ended slavery, deepened in faith as the war went on, and fought hard without once succumbing to hatred. A Lincoln for the ages and a Lincoln for the angels already existed. Now the two seemed to be at war for his epitaph.


NOW HE BELONGS TO THE A

What did Edwin Stanton actually say at Lincoln's deathbed? Language has become a central subject in Lincoln studies.

DAVID HUGHES

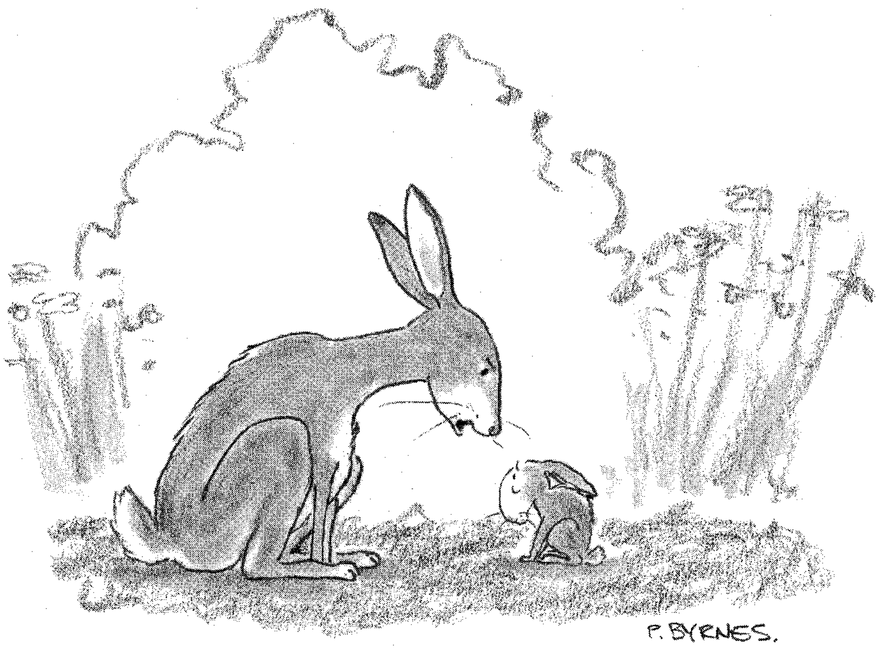
When I got back to New York, I called Harold Holzer, an old friend, whom I had known as a spokesman for the Metropolitan Museum of Art but who is also one of the country's leading independent Lincoln scholars. He suggested a longer reading list of the recent Lincoln literature, and I made my way through as much as I could. There's a lot to read. In books published in the past two years alone, you can read about Lincoln's "sword" (his writing) and about his "sanctuary" (the Soldiers' Home just outside Washington, where he spent summers throughout the war). You can read a book about Lincoln's alleged love affair with a young officer, and one about Lincoln's relations, tetchy but finally triumphant, with Frederick Douglass. There is no part of Lincoln, from manhood to death, that is not open and inscribed. You can learn that some of Lincoln's intimates believed his melancholy was rooted in extreme constipation ("He had no natural evacuation of bowels," a friend explained) and also what formula was used to embalm him, a gruesome but far from trivial point. (The formula, which gave the body the appearance of marble, was being used to keep intact the bodies of the boys whose corpses had to be shipped home to their families during the war.)

It emerged that there had long been debates, natural in an age before mechanical recording, over what had actually been said at any given moment by Lincoln or someone in his circle, and what people thought had been said. Even with the Gettysburg Address, despite our possession of what seem to be two drafts and what are certainly several later copies in Lincoln's own hand, there are many arguments about exactly what Lincoln said. Gabor Boritt, in his book "The Gettysburg Gospel," has a thirty-page appendix that compares what Lincoln (probably) read at the memorial with what people heard and reported. Most of the differences are small, and due to understandable confusions—"The world will little note nor long remember what we say here" became in some reports "The world will little heed what we say here"—or to impatience on the part of a reporter. (The Centralia *Sentinel*, of Lincoln's home state, wanting nothing to do with fancy talk, had the speech begin, simply, "Ninety years ago . . .")

A few disputes seem more significant. The Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, a Republican paper, made the famous first sentence end "that all mankind are created free and equal by a good God," though it's hard to know whether its reporter had deliberately italicized the point or was simply hearing it with his heart. Also in the first sentence, Lincoln's remark that the nation was "conceived in liberty" was reported in some newspapers as "consecrated to liberty," a more religious reading of the intended message, and there are those who believe that Lincoln made an impromptu alteration. Many reporters heard Lincoln say, "This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom," though the phrase "under God" occurs in neither draft of the text; Lincoln may have spontaneously inserted it—a sign of his growing religious consciousness during the last year of the war. In "Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words," Douglas L. Wilson worries his way through the possibility, preserved in one of the drafts, that Lincoln referred not to "government of the people, by the people," etc., but to "*this* government of the people, by the people," etc., deliberately circumscribing the meaning.

It is not hard to see, in this exegetical exactitude, something that recalls the attention that scholars give to fine-point disputes about the words and tales of Jesus and his apostles. This attention to verbal minutiae extends to the secondary figures in the Lincoln gospel, not least his assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Booth either did or did not say, just as, right before, or shortly after he murdered the President, "*Sic semper tyrannis*," the motto on the state flag of Virginia. Possibly, he cried "The South is avenged!" or "Revenge for the South," and he cried this in the box, or on the stage, or paired with another cry. Of the forty or so reliable witnesses to the assassination whose accounts are collected in Timothy S. Good's "We Saw Lincoln Shot," some sixteen heard the Latin or the English, only four heard both, and many say that they didn't hear the assassin say anything at all. Two witnesses heard Booth say, "I have done it!" Well, which was it? It is possible that he said only *Sic semper tyrannis*, onstage or off, and that the words were easily misheard by a stunned audience: "The South is avenged." On the other hand, he may have cried out both, and then added the gloating remark as he fled. But then why didn't more people hear him?

Booth himself, for whom the assassination was, Swanson says, a kind of diabolical work of performance art, insisted on the "right" reading. "I shouted *Sic semper* before I fired," he wrote a few days later, in his own note, which he intended to be sent to the newspapers. One of the more pathetic-horrific aspects of the assassination was how desperate Booth was to read his notices in the next day's papers. Having tailored his performance to what he believed would be a shrewd public appeal—even Northerners would have doubts about Lincoln's absolutist claims to power—he was shocked to find that he had canonized a saint and been cast as a villain. (One of the odd things in American history is that we are inclined to "psychologize" acts of assassination that, whatever dark corner of the psyche they are torn from, are clearly and explicitly political in motive. Oswald shot Kennedy in an act of terrorism on behalf of Castro; Sirhan Sirhan killed Bobby Kennedy because he believed him to be pro-Israel; Booth killed Lincoln because Booth was a violent racist who thought that Lincoln would enfranchise blacks, and that if he was dead this would be less likely to happen—as, indeed, it turned out to be.)



"I'm not hopping mad, just hopping disappointed."

The tendency to obsess over single words and phrases reflects, in part, the semi-divine status of Lincoln in American history. But it also reflects a desire to show that rhetoric and writing were as essential to his career as acts and orders and elections. In the past twenty-five years, and particularly since the publication of Garry Wills's "Lincoln at Gettysburg" (1992), language and its uses has become a central Lincoln subject. Two prominent strains of rhetoric run through the period—the Biblical and the classical—and political ideas tend to get tinted by whichever of them the speaker uses. Reading Edward Everett's Gettysburg address, the two-hour set speech that preceded Lincoln's and was meant to be the real event of the Gettysburg commemoration, one is startled to see how relentlessly classical it is in tone and analogy: Everett goes on and on about Marathon and the Greeks and the Persian invasions, in order to "elevate" Gettysburg and the Union soldiers. Lincoln's rhetoric is, instead, deliberately Biblical. (It is difficult to find a single obviously classical reference in all of his speeches.) Lincoln had mastered the sound of the King James Bible so completely that he could recast abstract issues of constitutional law in Biblical terms, making the proposition that Texas and New Hampshire should be forever bound by a single post office sound like something right out of Genesis.

What strikes a newcomer to Lincoln's speeches, however, is how rare those famous cadences are; their simple, resonant language—"with malice towards none, with charity for all"; the concluding and opening lines of the Gettysburg Address—is memorable in part because there isn't much of it. The majority of Lincoln's public utterances are narrowly, sometimes brilliantly, lawyerly—even, on occasion, crafted to give an appearance of inevitability to oratorical conclusions that are not well supported by the chain of reasoning that precedes them. The undramatic, small-print language in which Lincoln offered the Emancipation Proclamation is the most famous instance of his mastery of anti-heroic rhetoric. (Karl Marx said that it reminded him of "ordinary summonses sent by one lawyer to another.")

But Lincoln believed in legalism. One of his first public speeches, the Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum, in Springfield in 1837, declared a radical insistence on "reason" to be the only acceptable form of public discourse; the cure for the prevalence and epidemic of violence in American life would be "hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason": "Passion has helped us, but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason—cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason—must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence." Lincoln tempered but never really abandoned that conviction. His rhetorical genius lay in making closely reasoned argument ring with the sound of religious necessity.

There is, in consequence, often a subtle disjunction between Lincoln's content and his codas, as James Oakes puts it in his fine new account of Lincoln's friendship with Frederick Douglass, "The Radical and the Republican." The first two-thirds of the speech that Lincoln delivered at Cooper Union, in New York, in February of 1860, and that is generally thought to have made him President—it turned him from a local to a national figure—is devoted to a maniacally detailed inspection of how twenty-three of the "thirty-nine," the signers of the Constitution of 1789, voted during their careers on the issue of federal regulation of slavery. Lincoln had tabulated the results with all the dramatic flair of an insurance adjuster: his point is that the framers and signers, when in the Senate and the House, voted regularly to extend and prohibit slavery, thereby giving at least a passive endorsement to the view that the Constitution allowed the federal government to legislate about it in all its parts.

Yet the argument is carried on in numbing and what might seem to be irrelevant detail: after all, slavery wouldn't suddenly become noble if the framers *had* reserved its governance for the states. Yet by making it plain that this *is* an argument, an appeal not to sentiment but to constitutional law, Lincoln places his own unqualified anti-slavery sentiment on the same dryly legal and procedural grounds that he had recommended at the Lyceum. The result is the same, as he knew perfectly well. That's why the final cry of the Cooper Union speech is so suddenly uncompromising and even frankly warlike: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

In an acerbic, disabused, but ultimately convincing book, "Lincoln the Lawyer," the historian Brian Dirck argues that Lincoln took away from the practice of law and the love of legal language both a feeling for "grease"—that is, for finding an acceptable middle ground between contending parties—and a habit of detachment. In the old hagiography, Lincoln the lawyer was a fiery, folksy fighter against injustice; to more recent, disillusioned revisionists, he was a corporate lawyer, a "railroad" lawyer doing the work of the new industrialists. Dirck shows that both accounts are overdrawn. (Lincoln did do some work for the railroads, but it was relatively rare and relatively minor.) The bulk of his legal work—which took up the bulk of his professional life—was the predictable work of a small-town lawyer with a wide practice: property disputes, petty criminal cases, family arguments over money, neighbor at war with neighbor, bankruptcies, and, oddly, libel suits where local women defended themselves against charges of prostitution. His practice was the legal equivalent of a small-town doctor's, treating head colds, lice, scarlet fever, and a rare case or two of venereal disease.

What he learned was not faith in a constant search for justice but the habit of empathetic detachment. When we look closely, Dirck says, "we can see Lincoln the President trying hard to apply a lawyer's grease to the shrill machinery of war." Dirck insists that Lincoln's magnanimity, which was real, should not be "sentimentalized as a form of kindliness. . . . His magnanimity was also a function of his lawyerly sense of distance from other people's motives, and his appreciation—honed by decades of witnessing nearly every imaginable form of strife in Illinois's courtrooms—of the value of reducing friction as much as possible." The lack of vindictiveness that Lincoln displayed (his favorite expression, his secretary John Hay once explained, was "I am in favor of short statutes of limitations in politics") was the daily requirement of a small-town lawyer. Lincoln believed in letting go; his magnanimity was more strategic than angelic.

But what did Edwin Stanton really say at Lincoln's deathbed? Swanson's endnotes lead one to Jay Winik's endnotes in *his* book on the end of the Civil War, "April 1865." I called Winik, an author and historian, and he said, a little ruefully, that his insertion of "angels" into the text had been "the element most open to misinterpretation" in his ambitious and far-ranging volume. His endnote leads one, eventually, to "Twenty Days," by Dorothy and Philip Kunhardt, Jr., a well-made book of photographs from the eighteen-sixties, which in turn leads the reader directly to the ur-source of the angels. The unorthodox, heretical account of Stanton's words is actually much easier to "source" than the canonic and orthodox and familiar one: it comes from a stenographic record made in the bedroom that night by a young man named James Tanner.

Tanner was a corporal who had had both legs amputated after the Second Battle of Bull Run—he walked on peg legs—and lived in the house next door to the boarding house, Petersen's, where Lincoln was taken. Sometime that night, as Stanton was beginning to interrogate witnesses to the shooting, one of his generals appeared on the steps of the Petersen house and called out for someone who could write shorthand. Tanner heard him, and hobbled down to take dictation. He spent the rest of the night beside the dying President.

The scene in the famous "rubber room," as Holzer has called it—in the endless prints and other popular images, the walls of the room expand constantly outward, pressed by the number of dignitaries who had to be included—was uglier than even the more faithful imagery shows. Lincoln's head wound was bleeding throughout the night, and the doctors had to remember to cover up the blood with fresh towels when Mrs. Lincoln, fallen into a grief from which she never really recovered, wandered in. Lincoln was laid diagonally across the too short bed, knees up, and naked underneath the mustard plasters that had been placed on his chest.

Stanton took charge, dictating messages and taking evidence, with Tanner pressed into service as his secretary. At last, at seven-twenty-two in the morning, Tanner writes:

> The Reverend Dr. Gurley stepped forward and lifting his hands began "Our Father and our God" and I snatched pencil and notebook from my pocket, but my haste defeated my purpose. My pencil point (I had but one) caught in my coat and broke, and the world lost the prayer, a prayer that was only interrupted by the sobs of Stanton as he buried his face in the bedclothes. As "Thy will be done, Amen" in subdued and tremulous tones floated through the little chamber, Mr. Stanton raised his head, the tears streaming down his face. A more agonized expression I never saw on a human countenance as he sobbed out the words: "He belongs to the angels now."

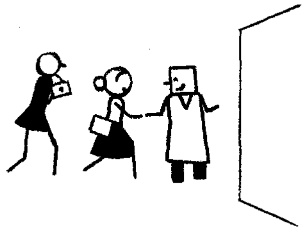
Note, though, that while Tanner presumably heard all this, he didn't actually claim (as is sometimes implied in the pro-angels literature) to have recorded it in situ, what with the broken pencil. Still, his account, the ur-source of the "angels" quote, sounds fairly solid.

What would those angels have summoned forth to the "Lincoln men" standing by his deathbed? The imagery of "angels" seems to have entered Lincoln's own rhetoric for the first time when he was revising Secretary of State William Seward's proposals for his first Inaugural. Seward had, with what must have been maddening condescension, slipped the new President a letter detailing what he ought to say to the country. It included a vague, conventional reference to the "guardian angel" of the nation. Lincoln seized on that reference and turned it into one of his most memorable rhetorical inventions, the "better angels of our nature," which might yet keep the country from war. The force of the rhetoric is such that its meaning can still be a bit obscure: North and South would not go to war, Lincoln was arguing, because of their common sense of a shared past. Lincoln's own angels already belong to history, to the ages.

The question of Lincoln and the angels leads to the most vexed question in all the Lincoln literature, that of his faith. How religious—how willing to credit more than metaphoric angels—did the men in the room think that Lincoln was? It is vexed because the evidence points to two truths, difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, Lincoln was all his life—aggressively in his youth, more mildly in his age—anti-clerical and anti-dogmatic, not any kind of churchgoing Christian but a profound and declared skeptic. In his first campaign for Congress, he admitted that he was not a member of any church and that "in early life" he had argued for the "Doctrine of Necessity"—that is, a belief in man as a mere pawn of universal law, without free will. Both Mary Lincoln and his Springfield law partner William Herndon (also his first biographer) were unequivocal about his rejection of any standard churchgoing faith, and the various posthumous claims that he "converted" to some form of Christianity have been mostly exploded.

Yet, undeniably, as the war and his Presidency progressed, Lincoln spoke increasingly of God—inserted God, as it seems, into the Gettysburg Address—and evidently had some kind of complicated and rich sense of "necessity" and a supernatural presiding power. The second Inaugural is the most famous instance, with its insistence that "if God wills that [the war] continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

This is a darker vision of Providence, and of God, than is quite compatible with any kind of ordinary Protestantism. In a review of James Takach's "Lincoln's Moral Vision," Lucas E. Morel writes, "Lincoln's perplexing piety comprised a fiercely independent admixture of Enlightenment rationalism and Calvinist fatalism." His faith was rooted mainly in a kind of mystical inner sense of predestination, not so far from that youthful doctrine of necessity. He found no serenity in the idea that he was doing God's work. His point in the second Inaugural is not that he is doing God's will but that God's will is going to be done, no matter what Lincoln does. He thought not that God was on his side or the other but that God had determined on this conflict, perhaps as a collective punishment for the sin of slavery, perhaps for reasons permanently mysterious to men. He came increasingly to believe in Providence, but it was a Providence that acted mercilessly through History, not one that regularly interceded with compassion. That was left to men, and Presidents.



The one place in America where you can get a sense of Lincoln the President at work and at play is the Soldiers' Home, on the outskirts of Washington, about three miles from the White House. After the death of his son Willie, in 1862, Lincoln used a cottage on the grounds as a kind of retreat, a proto-Camp David, and spent summers there from 1862 to 1864. Every other place associated with him either predates the Presidential years or has changed so much that it is unrecognizable. But Lincoln's cottage, which has been largely neglected, still resonates with the period. It was an odd location for him; though it was cooler than central Washington in the summer, it was also a soldiers' retirement home, with a cemetery just alongside, where the Union dead were sent to be buried.

Lincoln loved the Soldiers' Home, preferring it to the stolid White House. Walking through the buildings, one sees that the rooms have a nineteenth-century spaciousness and ease; and one is reminded that, as the British biographer Richard Carwardine points out, the young Lincoln was avid as much for bourgeois respectability as for riches, or even for fame. It was in these bright but cozy rooms, too, and out on the surrounding lawns, that he and Stanton really took the measure of each other. The story of Stanton and Lincoln—the reason that, at the very last moment, the assemblage deferred to Stanton to say the final words—is well retold by Doris Kearns Goodwin and, in particular detail, by William Lee Miller. In the eighteen-fifties, Stanton was a prominent litigator, and in 1855 he and Lincoln were thrown together in a complicated patent litigation with an Illinois angle. Lincoln felt that here at last

"Sorry—that's the screen saver."

was his opportunity to break into big-time law. He prepared maniacally, only to find himself, at the trial in Cincinnati, shuffled off by the senior Stanton and prevented not only from arguing but even from consulting with the senior lawyers. Lincoln didn't hold the incident against Stanton, a Democrat whose contempt for him even after he was nominated for President was almost open, and made him Secretary of War after his first choice, Simon Cameron, got caught up in a scandal.

At the Soldiers' Home, Lincoln and Stanton became friends. They shared a common tragedy—both had lost a son in the course of the war—and a common nature: outwardly remote, inwardly passionate. (When Stanton's young wife died, he insisted on having a wedding dress made for her to be buried in, and for months he wandered through their house, half mad, crying out for his bride.) Stanton, too, had a cottage at the Soldiers' Home, and spent summers there with Lincoln. Most people intensely disliked Stanton; one Cabinet secretary called him "rude and offensive." But at the Soldiers' Home, as Matthew Pinsker shows in his book "Lincoln's Sanctuary," another side of his nature became apparent: he played mumblety-peg with a soldier and, on one memorable occasion, spent an evening with Lincoln untangling peacocks. (Small blocks of wood had been tied to the birds' feet with strings to keep them from flying away, but the lines got snarled in the trees.) As Stanton came to know Lincoln, he formed an opinion of his intellect so high that he said to one of his fellow-lawyers, "No men were ever so deceived as we at Cincinnati." It was a friendship deep enough, and famous enough, to make everyone in Lincoln's last room wait for Stanton to speak.

Though it is easy to track the exact source of the revisionist "angels," it is much harder to find the source of those "ages." Like many famous scenes and remarks, it enters memory through a window while no one is looking. When, in 1890, John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Lincoln's two secretaries, wrote what was to be for almost a century the standard life of Lincoln (whom they called the Tycoon, seeing him as a politician of limitless shrewdness rather than as a saint of infinite patience), the entire atmosphere of the death scene had changed and, with it, the words. Their Stanton coolly breaks the silence of death and pronounces his benediction: "Now he belongs to the ages." Hay was certainly in the room, near the deathbed, and knew the people involved far better than Tanner could have, and his account is crisp and definitive-sounding.

But where before then had it been registered? The trail of footnotes leads one eventually to the most thorough account of how Stanton's words entered the American memory, and it occurs, bizarrely, in Otto Eisenschiml's 1937 book "Why Was Lincoln Murdered?"—bizarre because Eisenschiml, whose book was a best-seller in its day, was a conspiracy theorist who believed that Stanton had conspired to have Lincoln assassinated. (His motive was supposedly to gain a harder peace for the South than Lincoln would have allowed, though there is no evidence that they disagreed on this point.) Eisenschiml, forgotten now, was an original, a German-born chemist turned amateur historian who helped invent the style and model of a certain kind of American paranoia: the by now familiar fussing over odd but irrelevant inconsistencies (Stanton seems to have had enough testimony to identify Booth shortly after midnight on the night of the murder, but he didn't release his name until later that morning—because, of course, he wanted Booth to escape, etc.) and the same patterns of sinister coincidence; Oliver Stone claimed that the telephone lines went down in Washington after Kennedy's murder, and, sure enough, Eisenschiml believed that the telegraph lines were deliberately cut in Washington on the night of Lincoln's assassination.

Yet paranoid obsession can be a spur to close study, and Eisenschiml took the trouble to find out when "ages" might have entered the imagination. Once again, there is a wildly varying set of memories. Lucius E. Chittenden, who had worked for Lincoln in the government, claimed that what Stanton actually said was "There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen!," although he was not at Lincoln's bedside. One of Stanton's clerks, also not present, insisted that he said, "Ah, dear friend! there is none now to do me justice; none to tell the world of the anxious hours we have spent together!" But, in the twenty-five years that separated the scene and Hay's version of it, the record is cloudy. None of the newspaper reports in the days following the assassination, though all contain scenes from the deathbed, mention the words. (Eisenschiml imagines that Stanton's having been reported as saying "angels" would have been a disaster—too self-consciously pious—and that he spread the "ages" story afterward. "Perhaps he told it to eager-eared hostesses," Eisenschiml sneers.) Dr. Charles Sabin Taft, one of the attending doctors who had been in Ford's Theatre, wrote in notes that he claimed to have made the following day (but did not publish until twenty-eight years later), "When it was announced that the great heart had ceased to beat, Mr. Stanton said in solemn tones, 'He now belongs to the Ages.' " But Taft's father also kept a diary (it is available online) and, in recounting the scene as his son described it to him, he makes mention of neither ages nor angels.

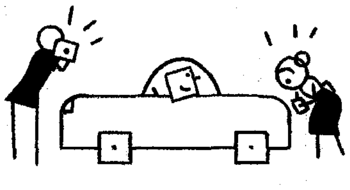
Hay put his stamp on the words as we usually hear them. That was adequate warrant for a century, and perhaps should be still. He was there; he had no plausible motive to lie and no reason to misremember. It is possible that there is an obscure source for the epitaph in the twenty-five years between the event and the biography, but the famous words seem remarkably fragile, insecurely sourced and late in arriving, like so many other moments in history that seem sure until they are inspected, and become more uncertain the longer they are sought.

There's another rhetorical style that runs like the Mississippi right down the middle of the mid-nineteenth-century American mind, shaping phrases and supervising thoughts, flowing as strong as the classical, the Biblical, and the lawyerly, and that is the Shakespearean. Lincoln's love of Shakespeare is familiar, but is usually treated as a delightful character trait, like his fondness for ice cream or the comedy of Artemus Ward. But Lincoln's taste in Shakespeare was narrow, significant, and almost obsessive. He didn't love "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It"; it was the histories and three of the tragedies that held him. In 1863, he repeatedly went to see "Henry IV" when James H. Hackett was playing Falstaff, with all the Falstaffian black comedy against conscription and the cult of honor. He took volumes of Shakespeare out of the Library of Congress; went to a Washington theatre to see the famous E. L. Davenport in "Hamlet"; attended private recitations of Shakespeare; sought out a production of "Othello"; watched Edwin Booth, John Wilkes's brother, in "Richard III," and the greatest American Shakespearean, Edwin Forrest, in "King Lear," at Ford's. Just five days before the assassination, on April 9, 1865, steaming up the Potomac in the Presidential yacht, he spent "several hours" reading aloud from Shakespeare to those on board. Reciting from his favorite plays was a weakness of his; on August 22, 1863, Hay records in his diary that he fell asleep at the Soldiers' Home while listening to Lincoln recite Shakespeare.

In a letter to Hackett, Lincoln admitted, "Some of Shakespeare's plays I have never read; while others I have gone over perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader. Among the latter are 'Lear,' 'Richard III,' 'Henry VIII,' 'Hamlet,' and especially 'Macbeth.' I think nothing equals 'Macbeth.' " These are all dramas of unexpected murder, of ambition turned into evil. Many writers have commented on how strange and naked it is that Lincoln, who, as his partner Herndon wrote, ran relentlessly on the "little engine" of his own ambition, should embrace a tragedy about ambition. He was plainly haunted by the imagery of fallen and ruined leaders, and sensed how fine a line separates a king and a usurper, or a Lincoln and a Davis.

But even stranger and more striking is Lincoln's identification or, at the very least, fascination with the figure of Claudius. In that same letter to Hackett, Lincoln insisted that Claudius's soliloquy beginning "O, my offense is rank" was superior to any of Hamlet's, and we know that he committed it to memory, and would recite it at length even to acquaintances—an artist who had come to paint his portrait, for instance. Lincoln's evaluation was as unorthodox then as it is now. And what is the burden of Claudius's speech? It is about guilt and ambition, and about the fraternal blood-dealing that that produces. As Kenneth Tynan has pointed out, Claudius's tragedy is that he is clearly the most able man in Denmark, but he has got his throne through blood and cannot be free of the taint. (No one, except Hamlet, criticizes his conduct as king.) His speech runs through to the difference between his conduct as seen on earth and in Heaven, and ends with an image of his soul as a "limed" bird, caught in a sticky trap, that gets more stuck as it struggles:

"Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? what rests?
Try what repentance can: what can it not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay!



There's no reason to believe that Lincoln "identified" with Claudius, or thought his own conduct evil. But he shuddered to think what his ambition, together with his principles, had helped make happen. He recognized and understood the pain of one who, believing himself, as Claudius does, to be essentially good and capable of salvation, knows that he is covered with blood—one who, having chosen to take on the weight and worry of the world, knows that he has done it and, like Macbeth, too, cannot be free of its guilt: *Help, angels! Make assay!*

What makes Lincoln still seem noble, to use an old-fashioned word, is that he had not a guilty sense of remorse but a tragic sense of responsibility. He believed that what he was doing was right; he knew that what he was doing was dealing death to the undeserving (knowledge that must have been doubled at the Soldiers' Home as the bodies were brought to be buried week after week). If Lincoln truly has something in common with Jesus, it is that he is the model of a charismatic ethical intelligence who was also a calm dealer of punishment on a vast scale: *Some to my right and some to my left* . . .

Lincoln exemplifies the problem of liberal violence: the disjunction between the purity of our motives (as they appear to the liberal) and the force of our violence (as it is experienced by the victim). The reality of his faith in his beloved rule of reason, and the constant presence of his magnanimous and winning character, doesn't preclude his engagement in mass killing. *The corrupted currents of the world.* (That other autodidact Midwesterner Harry Truman also turned to "Hamlet" to find words to expiate his blood-guilt, underlining at the end of a book about the atomic bomb a long quote from the last act of "Hamlet" that begins, "Let me speak to the yet unknowing world/How these things came about: So shall you hear/Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts/Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,/Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause . . . And, in this upshot, purposes mistook/Fall'n on the inventors' heads.")

Lincoln's spiritual state by the end of the war was very much like that of a Shakespearean tragic hero: resigned to a deadly fate that he did not will but would not avoid. Shakespeare's continuing appeal to liberal societies, despite his feudal settings, lies in his ability to create characters who intend no harm and end up covered with blood. Shakespeare suits liberal violence, with its corrupted currents, admirable ambition, and casual slaughters—and what makes Lincoln and Truman admirable, if not heroic, is that they knew it.

I went at last to visit the Petersen House, the tiny old boarding house where Lincoln spent his last hours. I stood in a long line stretching out to the door, surrounded by other tourists, waiting to get to the room at the back where Lincoln died. Now, after months of reading, I was convinced that the first thought that would have crossed Stanton's mind was the angels. Given the man, and the association, what else but angels?—though perhaps they would be not so much the religious angels of an ascension as the Shakespearean angels of fate, the ones who wear us out, the angels whom Claudius prayed to and who sang to Hamlet at his end.

And then, later, someone—perhaps Stanton at the time, or perhaps only Hay long afterward—thought that there was more point and solemn originality in what someone else (Hay from the very moment, perhaps?) thought he had heard, and decided to change it. As the line shuffled forward, I made up my mind about what must have happened: Stanton had muttered "angels," been heard as saying "ages," and, if he had been asked which afterward, would have been torn. He might have decided to enable the mishearing, in order to place Lincoln in history, not Heaven. It seemed possible that both versions were true, one to the intention and the other to the articulation, one to the emotion of the moment and one, in retrospect, to the meaning of the life. Angels or ages? Lincoln belongs to both.

The sentence forms in the mind, and with it the thought that there would be a good place to end: *he belongs to both.* But, as the queue inches forward and I can see, at last, into the room that I have been reading about . . . I want to laugh. This place isn't small; it's *tiny*. They brought him here, to this back room, I had learned, because all the other rooms in the house were too messy for a President to die in, and yet: *four* people would make it crowded; six would overwhelm it; the forty or so who passed in and out, and the ten or twenty who crowded inside at the end would have turned it into the stateroom scene in "A Night at the Opera."

In the brief moment given to each visitor to look inside, I wished for a machine that would be able to re-create every breath of air, every vibration that ever took place in a room. And then I knew that we probably would not have understood any better had we been standing there than we do now. Stanton was weeping, Lincoln had just died, the room was overwhelmed, whatever he said was broken by a sob—the sob, in a sense, is the story. History is not an agreed-on fiction but what gets made in a crowded room; what is said isn't what's heard, and what is heard isn't what gets repeated. Civilization is an agreement to keep people from shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theatre, but the moments we call historical occur when there is a fire in a crowded theatre; and then we all try to remember afterward when we heard it, and if we ever really smelled smoke, and who went first, and what they said. The indeterminacy is built into the emotion of the moment. The past is so often unknowable not because it is befogged now but because it was befogged then, too, back when it was still the present. If we had been there listening, we still might not have been able to determine exactly what Stanton said. All we know for sure is that everyone was weeping, and the room was full. ♦

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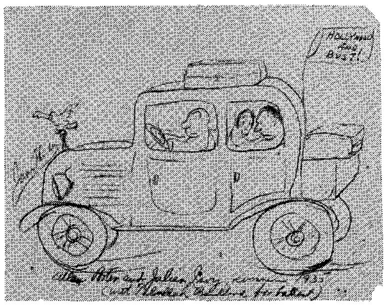

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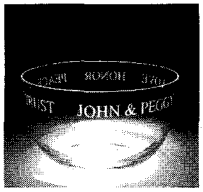

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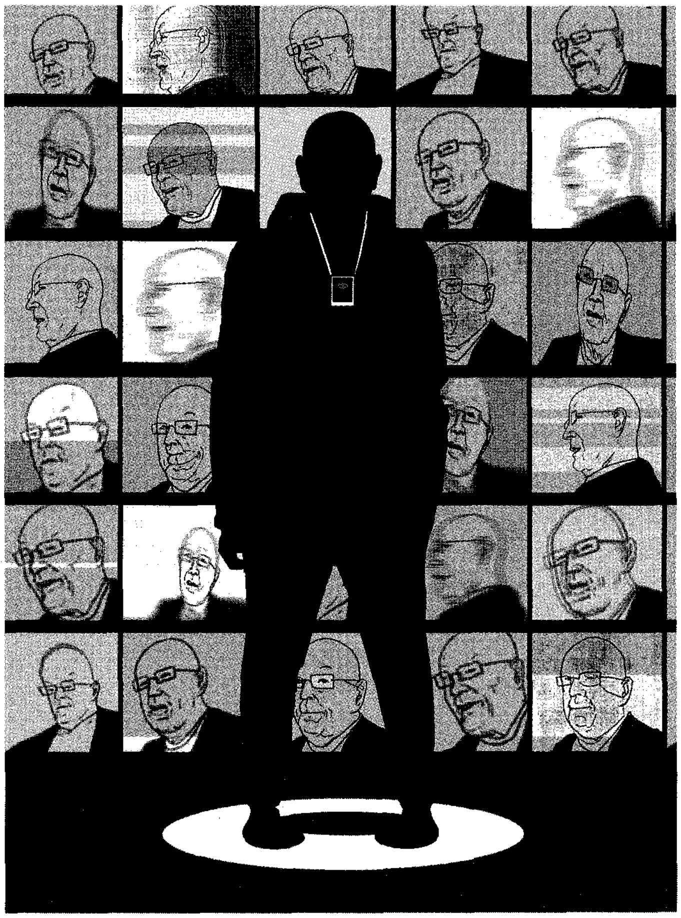
DEPT. OF TECHNOLOGY

REMEMBER THIS?

A project to record everything we do in life.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

October arrived in 1998, and Gordon Bell went paperless, after hearing from a professor at Carnegie Mellon who was engaged in a project to scan a million books and post them online. The professor, a friend of Bell's named Raj Reddy, had called to ask if he could scan and post Bell's books, including one on how to start a high-tech business. Bell said, "Of course." This, by the way, is the Gordon Bell, aged seventy-two, of Microsoft, who has been described as "the Frank Lloyd Wright of computers"; who, at the Digital Equipment Corporation, was among the first engineers to fashion computers into a network; who led the National Science Foundation effort to link the world's supercomputers—the Internet. The Gordon Bell, incidentally, who believes that one day houses will have no windows, so it won't matter where they are—screens on the walls will display whatever we want to look at. (Bell would like the screens in his dining room to display the view from a window of the Orient Express; he would also like to hear the train's sound effects.) The Gordon Bell who, owing to Reddy's call, and by means of custom programs and gadgets, now collects the daily minutiae of his life so emphatically that he owns the most extensive and unwieldy personal archive of its kind in the world.



Gordon Bell's personal archive is the most extensive of its kind.

ISTVAN BANYAI

The first epiphany of three in the making of Bell's archive occurred when Bell realized that if Reddy was scanning books into a computer, Bell could scan all the papers in his file cabinets and in the boxes crowding his garage, in California, and then throw them away. He could also scan his scrapbooks and photographs, the business cards he has saved, the posters on his walls, and his many commemorative T-shirts. It was too late to include his collections of razor blades, postcards, balsa-wood model airplanes, and salt and pepper shakers—those had been dispersed in childhood—but not his interesting coffee mugs, which were first photographed, or the manuals for his appliances, "because you can never find the damn things," Bell says.

The scanning took years, and it continues. Bell doesn't do the work himself—he hired Vicki Rozycki, a pleasant, determined, and resourceful woman, for the task. "There was a big, big file cabinet and bankers boxes that were visually a little overwhelming," Rozycki says. "But it wasn't like there was this Sisyphus guy pushing the rock up the hill."

Bell's archive now also contains a hundred and twenty-two thousand e-mails; fifty-eight thousand photographs; thousands of recordings of phone calls he has made; every Web page he has visited and instant-messaging exchange he has conducted since 2003; all the activity of his desktop (which windows, for example, he has opened); eight hundred pages of health records, including information on the life of the battery in his pacemaker; and a sprawling category he describes as "ephemera," which contains such things as books he has written and books from his library; the labels of bottles of wine he has enjoyed; and the record of a bicycle trip through Burgundy, where he tried to eat in as many starred restaurants as he could (he averaged 2.2 stars per meal—"I do a lot of measuring," he says).

In 2001, Bell published an article in a technical journal to announce that he had finished "the intellectual part" of going paperless. Then he had his second epiphany. He recalled a piece, published in *The Atlantic* in July, 1945, by Vannevar Bush, called "As We May Think." Bush, who had been the head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during the Second World War, speculated about what work scientists would take up, now that they no longer had to invent weapons. Among other things, he decided that innovations in photography would produce smaller cameras. "The camera hound of the future wears on his forehead a lump a little larger than a walnut," he wrote. He or she could take photographs all day. The problem would be what to do with them. "Consider a future device for individual use, which is a sort of mechanized private file and library," Bush continued. "It needs a name, and, to coin one at random, 'memex' will do." Memex stood for "memory extender."

A memex would consist of a desk that had "slanting translucent screens, on which material can be projected for convenient reading." Anything entered into the memex would be saved on microfilm. Bush thought that "if the user inserted 5000 pages of material a day it would take him hundreds of years to fill the repository, so he can be profligate and enter material freely."

By means of a code, a memex user could retrieve a book. He could project a book on one screen and a photograph, say, on another. When he found a congenial collection of material, a trail, he could join it together and save it, or add it to another trail—anticipating both Wikipedia and Google.

Bell, mindful of Bush's piece—and drawing on his own "Law of Computer Classes," which he wrote in 1972, and which predicted that a new class of computers would emerge roughly every ten years—realized that by 2007 the capacities of disk drives would likely be such (and they are) that even someone trying hard to fill one up would not be able to.

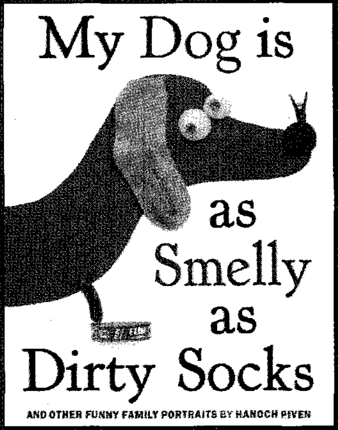
Having spent his life as an engineer, designing things and getting them built, Bell is now a researcher for Microsoft, in San Francisco. His project is his archive. He is only partly resigned to his changed circumstances. "I feel like I'm fooling around," he says. "People say, 'Gordon, you can fool around for a while.' Well, I got to have a project. I'm not a blue-sky guy at all. I'd never let anybody like me loose in a company."

Bell's principal collaborator, for the past five years, has been Jim Gemmell, a senior researcher whose office is at the Microsoft facility in Redmond, Washington. The project is called MyLifeBits, and its purpose is to find uses for the material that Bell is storing and that he and Gemmell believe everyone will eventually store on their computers. (By 2010, a typical life, they feel sure, will fit on a cell phone.) Bell's archive has two sections: a historical part and a contemporary part. Aware that they could add to the archive anything they wanted to, Bell and Gemmell began wondering what else they could collect. "We started thinking about Gordon's whole life," Gemmell says. "We started going into 'What if I stored everything, what would it mean, what are the implications? We don't know.'"

The most obdurate problem that Bell and Gemmell encountered was that there was no simple way to retrieve what they had stored, making the archive close to formless. "A black hole," Gemmell says, "because everything went in and nothing came out." Even so, they were avid to collect more.

Bell doesn't wear a walnut-size camera on his forehead. Since late 2004, however, he regularly wears around his neck a Microsoft device-in-development called a SenseCam. A SenseCam is a black box about the size of a cigarette pack which contains an infrared system—"same as in a burglar alarm," Bell says. "It senses heat—it takes a body a certain size to throw off enough heat to be recognized—and when it finds a person it takes a picture." It also takes a photograph when the light changes or at intervals up to a minute, depending on how it is set. To turn off the SenseCam, Bell puts it in his pocket—the darkness makes it stop working.

Lifelogging is the name of the activity that Bell is practicing. He is an extreme example of the form, the way Samuel Pepys was an extreme example of a diarist. Pepys's writing required attention in order to select from his experience the things he recorded. Lifelogging can be conducted with minimal engagement. You walk, and the camera around your neck takes photographs of things you may not even notice while you are occupied with whatever it is you are thinking about. If you feel your lifelog should include what you are thinking about, you can speak into a digital tape recorder, but Bell typically records only conversations. Occasionally, he feels encumbered by the project. "There's a number here," he says. "I'd like to say that I'm living ninety-five per cent of the time, keeping this system five per cent. I want to live a life, not be a slave to it." Bell's son Brigham, a software engineer in Colorado, regards his father's project as self-involved to the point of



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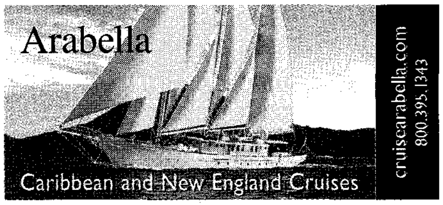

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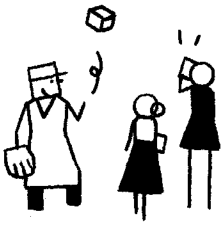
being “egocentric.” Gordon Bell considers himself something more like invisible in terms of the archive’s intentions. “I’m not particularly interesting,” he says. “I’m just typical of what you should be able to do.”

One morning recently, I sat in Bell’s office with Bell, Vicki Rozycki, and Kim Davis, a chaperone assigned to me by Microsoft, and we toured parts of Bell’s archive. On Rozycki’s desk was a computer screen, and on Bell’s there were two. “I was born in Kirksville, Missouri, 1934,” Bell said. “Vicki, do you want to bring up an image of Kirksville?” and she did, an aerial photograph of a town with the streets in a grid pattern. Bell studied the image on his own screen. The third screen was blank. “Kirksville had about ten thousand people,” he said. “It had a state teachers’ college, but it was mainly agricultural—wheat, corn, livestock, soybeans.”



Rozycki brought up the front page of the Kirksville *Daily Express* for August 20, 1934. “Has my birth announcement,” Bell said. He read some of the headlines: “‘45 GALLONS OF GASOLINE IN BARREL STOLEN HERE,’ ‘GERMAN VOTERS REBUKE NAZIS AND HITLER,’ and, look at this, ‘AL CAPONE IS TRANSFERRED TO ALCATRAZ.’”

“Here’s where Gordon grew up,” Rozycki said, “this red brick house. And here’s the church.”

The most thorough record of Bell’s past was written, in 1993, by a man named Peter Edelstein, who interviewed Bell for a book on people in the computer business. The book was never published, but Bell has the chapter about him in his archive. From it I learned that neither of Bell’s parents drank or swore. “My mother had been a grade-school teacher,” Bell told me, “and my father had an eighth-grade education.” His mother, Lola, was fond of books. His father, Chester, an electrician who owned an appliance store, liked reading trade manuals. Gordon, his mother told Edelstein, “asked more ‘why’s than any boy I ever saw.”

Rozycki brought up a photograph of a wide street and, on the far side of it, a two-story red brick building, with picture windows and a green awning. “Bell Electric,” she said. “His father’s business.”

“I started working occasionally for my father when I was around six,” Bell said. “The first skill I learned was how to join a plug to a wire.”

In the second grade, Bell developed a heart murmur and spent six months in bed, reading and listening to radio serials and playing with his chemistry set. His mother and father took him to the Mayo Clinic, where a doctor told him that he would grow up to be as strong as anyone else, but that he should rule out becoming a prizefighter. Bell asked if he could become an electrician. By eight, he was working for his father after school. Being small, he was suited to going under houses and into attic crawl spaces to install wires, but he didn’t enjoy doing it. From pieces of tin, he built a motor. By ten, he had decided that he wanted to be an engineer in charge of building a dam or a power plant. When the family, which included his sister, Sharon, who was six years younger than Bell, would drive near Keokuk, Iowa, he insisted that they visit the turbines at the power plant. Edelstein writes that Bell was particularly interested by their producing twenty-five-cycle current, “so when you went through Keokuk, all the lights were flickering.”

On the third screen, images summoned randomly by a screen saver began appearing. The first, in black-and-white, was of two little boys in Halloween costumes, scowling. Bell let it pass. The next, in color, was of a little boy leaning against a tree. “My grandson,” he said.

Rozycki brought up a black-and-white photograph of a boy, a girl, and a pony. A caption read, “Gordon, Sharon & Snippy.” Bell shook his head. “My dad thought I needed a pony,” he said. “He got me a pony that I didn’t particularly like. The pony would occasionally get loose and go through town, and I’d have to go chase the pony, and the pony would wipe kids off its back, because it didn’t like being ridden.”

On the screen to his left appeared a postcard that Bell leaned sideways to read. It was addressed to his father and signed “Opal.” “That’s one of the father’s siblings,” Rozycki said. “There were ten altogether. They had a farm and a sawmill.” The postcard was replaced by a newspaper article. “My mother’s obituary, at ninety-four,” Bell said.

In 1952, Bell went to M.I.T., the first person from Kirksville to go there. “Here’s your letter of acceptance,” Rozycki said, the clicks of her mouse making sounds like knitting needles. “I got a big trunk and put all my junk in it, and my parents took me to Boston,” Bell said. The city at night, seen from the banks of the Charles River, impressed all of them, and in the hotel Bell’s father wept, realizing that his son would never run Bell Electric.

“Here’s your fraternity,” Rozycki said.

“I joined a fraternity,” Bell said.

Rozycki brought up a black-and-white photograph of boys wearing suits and sitting at a table with a white tablecloth and eating. “I fell in with two Missouri boys—Kansas City and St. Louis—who got Ph.D.s in chemical engineering,” Bell said. “They were smart and supportive and nice. They helped me catch up with the prep-school kids who’d had calculus, and I hadn’t.”

On the third screen appeared a table with several nearly empty glasses of red wine. Bell ignored it. “I graduated in ’57, with a master’s,” Bell said. “Computers were just being invented.” He didn’t want to get a Ph.D., and he had an aversion to the rows of desks that were typical of engineering firms—he believed that anything designed by more than four or five people wouldn’t work the way it should. The head of his department knew a man who had started the University of New South Wales, in Australia, and he suggested that Bell teach computing there. Bell and a friend got Fulbrights to do it. At the university, Bell began seeing another Fulbright scholar, a city planner named Gwen Druyor, and when they returned to America they were married.

Onscreen, there was a photograph of a man and a woman standing side by side—his parents on their honeymoon. “St. Paul, Minnesota,” he said, “1925.” Two creases in the photograph showed that it had once been folded up. “I began studying for a doctorate at

M.I.T.," Bell said. In 1960, he went to work for the Digital Equipment Corporation, in Maynard, Massachusetts. At the time, the company, which is now owned by Hewlett-Packard, was bringing out its first computer. Brigham remembers that Bell "was at DEC all the time. He had an office at home, where he worked when he wasn't there, and every Sunday evening he had a meeting over the phone with the head of the company." Fatigued after six years, Bell left. "I was No. 2 by then, and took a six-year sabbatical to teach computer science and electrical engineering at Carnegie Mellon," Bell told me. Brigham says his father told him that he could teach a course only three times: "The first time to learn it, the second time to teach it well, and by the third time he was bored." Bell returned to DEC in 1972 and worked there until 1983. Edelstein writes that a colleague of Bell's says that he was "one of the most prolific idea-generators I have ever met." Edelstein also reproduces a description of Bell from a company history: "Bespectacled, with a round choirboy's face and windblown hair, Bell is a study in disarray. His mind races far ahead of his tongue. . . . He rarely finishes a sentence. He'll jump from his chair to make a point, gesturing wildly, head off for a book or paper that will show what he means, then turn around and sit down again, his mind leaping ahead to a new thought, a new insight."

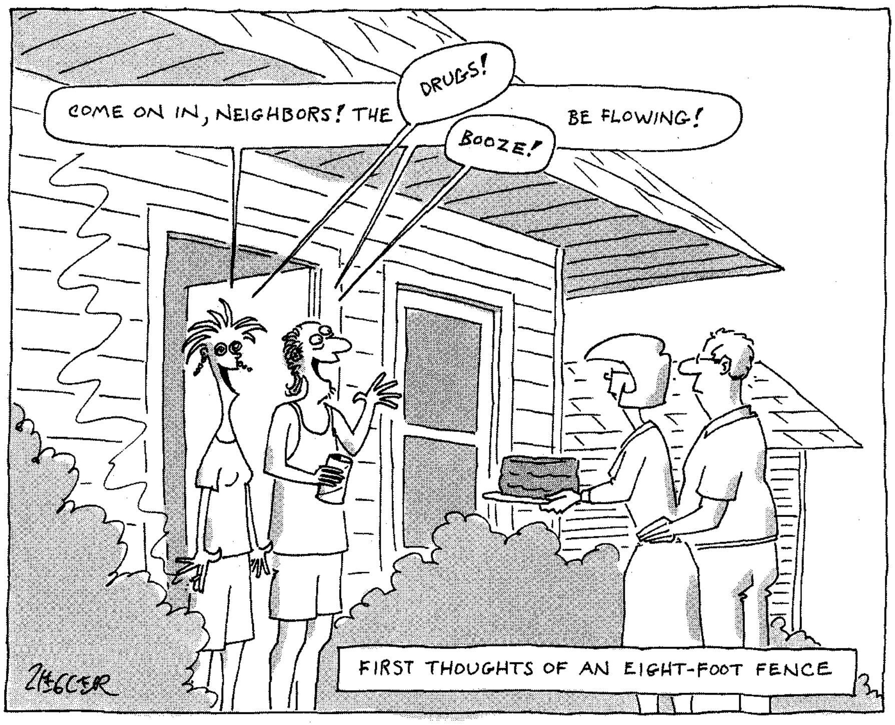
The company's C.E.O., Ken Olsen, thought that DEC had become too ordered for Bell's liking. "He's fun, exciting, charismatic," Olsen said, "but he doesn't fit into a disciplined, organized environment." Bell told a newspaper reporter that he "took it personally when anybody did anything dumb." Furthermore, he said, "It is excellence that drives me, and, God damn, that's hard when you've got this thing that's built on people."

Several children in front of a plank-frame schoolhouse appeared on the third screen—three rows, the teacher in the back row among the tallest children. "My father's the small boy in the front row," Bell said. Then came children in a clearing with a steam-driven tractor, beside the family sawmill. A photograph of a boy was next. Bell sat back. He flexed his brow. "That just looks like a kid," he said. He couldn't remember which one.

The cast of Bell's mind is practical, and because he works for Microsoft he is trying to discover a function that the company could sell. Some of his desires are mundane. He'd like an application that would tell him how many calories he has eaten. He wants to go to a restaurant and from the bill scan the nutritional components of his meal. Gemmell also thinks a record of a person's diet and health would be valuable—"something that told me, you haven't had any fibre," he says, "or you ought to drink more water. Or something that recorded the rhythm of your heartbeats and organ function, so that when a doctor asked, 'How long have you been feeling this way?,' you could answer explicitly. Or that told you something was wrong with you before you even felt it, a program that might alert you that you're running a fever." In addition, he would like something that sorted through a person's archive and suggested actions. "Computers are mostly sitting there doing nothing," Gemmell says. "They could be going through this record and learning things about our lives, spotting trends and correlations and summarizing, saying, 'You're back in Seattle today, and here's the people you met last time, and the notes you took that were really significant.'"

Curtis Wong, the manager of Gemmell's group at Microsoft, Next Media Research, would like a function that reminded him of what he was overlooking among the work he had collected—what, that is, might be lying among the pile of papers, or among his digital files, that was pressing. "A network display could do it, if it was dynamic and always changing," Wong says. "It's our bodies' natural inclination to ignore things that are the same, so that we can focus on things that are different—I think it's about predators. Your 'lifebits' could be surfaced, presented as patterns on an ambient display: 'A year ago I was doing X,' and there it is, or 'I haven't seen so-and-so in a long time.'" He'd also like a program that would somehow present a person with material on a matter when he hadn't even been sure what to ask for, a case in which the computer would do the thinking and the organizing.

Similarly, Bell and Gemmell would like software that organized the contents of the archive into movies—something, at least, to compress and shape it, to summarize its parts. "Auto-storytelling," Gemmell calls it. "My dream is I go on vacation and take my pictures and come home and tell the computer, 'Go blog it,' so that my mother can see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it. I don't have to do anything; the story is there in the pattern of the images."

Bell has tried several times to make movies from material he's stored—he showed me one of a two-hour lunch he'd had in Australia, where he still teaches—but he hasn't felt satisfied with the results. "What we're storing, really, is snippets and scenes and episodes," he says. "A movie tells a story, and we're not doing that." What Bell and the others imagine, ultimately, is a function by which a computer assembles a person's autobiography, which he or she authorizes and passes on.

One of the models Bell is interested in is proposed by the work of a principal researcher at Microsoft named Eric Horvitz. Horvitz is engaged in what he calls "complementary computing, where the computer understands human limitations and fills in the gaps," he told me in his office, in Redmond. Horvitz, who is the president-elect of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence—"triple-A. I.," he says—would like to see computers provide "a fabric that would extend us in areas where we're weak. If you look at twentieth-century cognitive psychology, what it showed was that people have vast abilities coupled with characterizable limitations and bottlenecks. There are whole areas of psychology—attention, judgment, and memory—where there are very crisp results about people doing things they don't want to do, forgetting things, and being biased in their judgment. To create a computation that understands those grooves and nooks and crannies, and using it in places where a computer can do well in a complementary way to extend people, is what I'm trying to do."

Horvitz is working on a project called Lifebrowser, which uses time lines as a means of locating images and information. On a computer screen in his office, Horvitz brought up images of his wife and son. "What's cool—I love this feature—I can say, 'Go to July 4th,' and it's making guesses about the things I am likely to remember, to use memory landmarks, and it jumped right to this place," he said. The screen showed several images—a small-town parade, and his wife and son among figures at a cookout, from July 4, 2005. Responding to his request, "The computer brought up its best guess," Horvitz said. He entered another year. The computer did not immediately respond. "It's thinking really hard about this," Horvitz said. "Now it's brought up a party at a beach." Horvitz tried July 4, 2003. "There's a parade again," he said. "It likes parades." He turned toward me; meanwhile, the computer brought up other images. "You can tell it, 'Be random,' or, 'Give me February 14, 2002,' or, 'Show me Valentine's Days from over the years,' or, 'Only Novembers.' It comes to understand your mind, how you organize your memories, by what you choose. It learns to become like you, to help you be a better you. Computers are going to become tools we work with and trust, rather than merely appliances."

ART.
ART IS A SNAP WHEN YOU KNOW HOW TO SPELL.

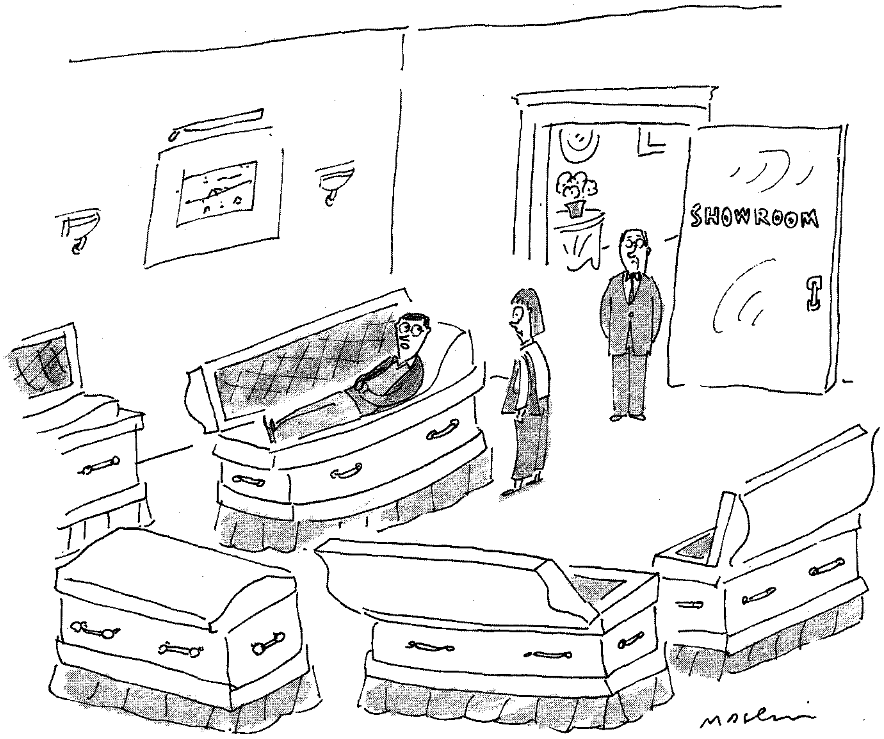
At night, he said, he sometimes hears his computer working. "I hear the fan, and I think, My system is consolidating new memories," he said. "It's like a human being dreaming."

Bell's third epiphany, a year ago, was the awareness that by adding contemporary material to his archive—images from the SenseCam, for example—he was building "a personal-transaction processing system." The term is from the financial world. "Every transaction you have—a deposit, signing a check—those are all registered as a unique event," he says. "Capturing all the activity associated with a Web page, or e-mails, or your phone calls, or the SenseCam means that every event in life is being logged. It has a time stamp on it. This idea of being obsessive about things is a feeling we have that this is the way things are going to be."

Gemmell imagines the computer becoming a version of an inquisitor. "People argue about the need to forget things," he says, "but if you look at business discipline—advising that you write everything down, your goals and objectives, and return to them to see how you did, examining what went wrong—I think the same thing could happen with our personal lives. Being able to say, 'Now I realize my tone of voice was threatening'—I think there's a real positive aspect in having the real record of what things looked and sounded like, and sequences of events, because we often end up believing things that are not based on facts anymore. Of course, the question built in there is how much can we take? How much do we need not to know reality because we can't bear the truth?" Defending the psychic advantages of an electronic archive, Gemmell likes to give the example of a child who complains that his or her father, after a divorce, failed to honor his obligations. The record, Gemmell says, might prove that he made all his visits. Such reasoning assumes that the meanings of our lives, what makes us individuals, are to be found in the pattern of things that happen to us—on the surface, that is—but such a record is always susceptible to shades of meaning.

Aside from issues of self-consciousness, being an entry in someone else's archive is a problem, although not a new one. People have for centuries betrayed themselves in letters and diaries, and they have used them to betray each other. A videotape, an ill-considered answering-machine message, makes an impression that is not easily undone. Gemmell imagines that the technology involved in assembling an archive will have to protect people in case someone "gets sloppy and hits the publish-to-the-world button." He wonders whether there is a means of retracting from the record. "How do we enable it?" Gemmell asks. "Do we know how to encrypt things and lock them down and get permission?" One of the tactics being considered is having the software corrupt a transcript by intermittently inserting phrases and words. It would be understood that any transcript, while essentially reliable, was not infallible—"an untrustworthy transcript," Gemmell calls it.

Memory revises itself endlessly. We remember a vivid person, a remark, a sight that was unexpected, an occasion on which we felt something profoundly. The rest falls away. We become more exalted in our memories than we actually were, or less so. The interior stories we tell about ourselves rarely agree with the truth. Someone uneasy with the candor of his archive could delete the material that pained him. People do it all the time: they destroy papers; they leave instructions in their wills for letters to be burned. In the novel "So Long, See You Tomorrow," William Maxwell writes, "Too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable, and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end. In any case, in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw." In "The Seven Sins of Memory," the Harvard psychologist Daniel Schacter mentions the work of Shelley Taylor, a psychologist at U.C.L.A., who has written that optimistic people tend to recall their pasts more favorably, and that the versions of their selves that they recalled contributed to their mental and physical health.



"Look bereaved."

• •

A reliance on the actual record might also inadvertently distort our impressions. Schacter has conducted experiments in which he photographed subjects performing several simple activities. He showed some of the subjects photographs of them doing a few of the activities. They recalled those activities easily, but were less likely to recall the activities that they had not been shown.

"What it suggests is that there might be unknown or unintended effects," he told me. "By overemphasizing certain parts, by recalling July 4th, for example, you might make it more difficult to recall July 5th. Even if you had time, which you don't, to recall all of it, your review has to be held onto by your memory, and at some point you're going to run into the limitations of memory. The archive idea suggests you could have it both ways, and in a limited extent it might be helpful, but I don't think it would end up being so utopian. The limitations of memory will intercede."

One morning, Bell and I and Kim Davis, my chaperone from Microsoft, went for a walk, so that Bell could take photographs with the SenseCam and show me what they looked like. We met at his apartment. On the corner was a fire station with a truck and some firemen outside. "Every morning around seven-thirty, they put up the hook and ladder to see if they will work," Bell said.

"I have a lot of images of that." At some distance we heard a siren. Bell leaned toward the sound. He shook his head. "They're not coming here," he said. "My dad was a volunteer fireman," he went on. "I have so many photos of firemen." He said that another thing he really likes is a crane.

Bell was wearing gray twill pants and a red turtleneck. He had a backpack and a dark blue cap that said "C.I.A." on the front. On the side it said "Honor, Bravery, Integrity."

"I got it at the C.I.A. store," Bell said. "I have a very large collection of hats, and I like to wear this one in San Francisco sometimes, just to be contrary."

We walked to the ferry terminal and had coffee and walked back to Bell's office. Instead of looking at the photographs he had just taken, we looked at some from the day before. "I took twelve hundred photos yesterday," Bell said, "and I ended up with a thousand or so. I try to do what we call 'clean living,' which is getting rid of any redundancies."

I asked if he knew of any projects similar to his own. He sat forward in his chair and put his hands on his head and said, "What's his name? He's a super, super, super genius. English."

"Stephen Hawking?"

"Probably smarter," Bell said. "A physicist. I've known him quite a while. He wrote a program called Mathematica." He rubbed his temples and sat up. "Stephen Wolfram!" he said. "He got his Ph.D. at, like, eighteen. Last night, he sent me an e-mail. He had this time line of his life and then he had a bunch of scrapbook pages that governed a period, and on his Web site you could click on them.

"There's another effort I should mention," he went on. "The National Library of Medicine took a bunch of Nobel Prize winners and has put their material on line. Pieces of their lives. You got all their papers, but you can't really tell what they are all about. You don't get very much about them as individuals. You get a notebook."

Bell stood up. "You will enjoy this," he said. From a bookshelf above his head, he brought down a box. He began sorting through it and talking, as if to himself. Now and then, he would lift something from it, as if it were a piece of evidence. "You got the high-school diploma, church certificates, National Honor Society, fraternity, Junior Tinkertoy Engineer certificate of award," he said. "Degrees. A couple of patents, some more patents," he said, turning pages. There were medals he had won. Holding a photograph, he said, "That's the original George Bush, in the Rose Garden." Bell was standing beside him. "Most of these are the kind of things that people hang on the wall. This is a certificate of passing the driver's school. I went to the driver's school for speeding. I just can't bring myself to throw any of them away."

He began putting things back in the box. "I've lost a lot of paper," he said plaintively. "I was pretty compulsively keeping it, but from time to time I would purge. If I had known what I would ultimately do, I would never have thrown anything away, because there's just a lot of interesting stuff I want to see."

In the article Bell wrote in 2001, to announce that he had finished the first part of his archive, he said that the obsolescence of software and technology was a threat to a computer archive. "A lot of things you may not be able to read a decade later," he said. "Will the jpeg format still be in existence? Will Word 6 be readable? I wrote an article called 'Dear Appy' "—for applications. "Basically, it was saying, 'Dear Appy, How committed are you? Signed, Lost Data.' Data can be lost in a disk, in a system, it can be lost in a standard somewhere. That's still a massive problem. If you look at all the problems that we can think about in the decade, ten, fifty, a hundred years, that's by far No. 1. The one that bugs me more than anything else is that."

"Do you ever think you'll be done?" I asked.

"Reach an end point, you mean?"

"Get bored. Grow interested in something else."

"Your aspirations go up with every new tool," he said. "You've got all this content there and you want to use it, but there's always this problem of wanting more." ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY UNDOING

BY GEORGE MEYER

I have been called a voluptuary, a sybarite, a hedonist, a creep. I am all of these things. I cannot live without pleasure. It is my oxygen—though I must also have regular oxygen.

Our existence is but an eyeblink. Why, then, should a man not chase down his passions, wrestle them to the dirt, and ride them like ostriches? He should, and I have.

Speedboats have been a lifelong diversion. Scotch, a serious problem. Yet no vice bedevils me like my one desperate fixation, my shameful ravening itch: I simply must attend conferences.

The sheer number is embarrassing—more than eight thousand. Did I make a pig of myself? Of course. What have I learned from all this conference-going? Everything, and nothing. *Tout, et rien.* It is the conferences themselves that I crave, in all their bewitching varieties. For those who would follow my wicked path, I offer a humble guide:

SEMINARS sell out fast. And why shouldn't they? They are pure catnip for the senses. One arrives late. Outside is the abandoned registration table with its fluttering clipboards, its orphan nametags. But inside, *inside!* You slip into a plush boudoir of ideas. The air is like opium, the sound system rich and buttery, the seat cushions almost obscenely supple. Loll back and sigh, for you are in the arms of a seminar.

There's nothing subtle about a PANEL DISCUSSION. Its thrills are dizzying, electric, a filthy mule kick to the greedy core of desire. Wisdom crackles from the dais. Insights dart and flash like the doomed fish in a whore's aquarium. You take notes like a madman, but your pen flies apart, slinging hot ink down your pant leg.

The POWWOW is frank, earthy, real. She is balsam and wood smoke; guileless yet beguiling. My first conference, at fourteen, was a powwow on urban renewal. I wobbled out long after dark, with a big sloppy grin.

The ROUNDTABLE is the rollicking wench of conferences, fleshy and abundant. No one sets out more bountiful pitchers of ice water. Get there early. Steal close to a fat, sweating carafe. Press it to your lips and quaff, quaff till you're breathless. No one will stop you. If they do, run. You can always sneak back in.

There are times when a man's soul is so battered, so hopelessly trampled, that the only balm is a TELECONFERENCE . . . or two, or three. Where is the shame in this? The French do it.

Lady CONFAB is not for grabbing. Try to possess her, and she wafts away. Clutch at her, and you grasp but the wispy tendrils of a dream. Do not sulk. In her own time, she will lure you to her podium, send you reeling with her fragrant mystery oils. When you come back to reality, your pockets will be bursting with business cards.

Some men—not men, troglodytes—say that the COLLOQUIUM is nothing but a tarted-up colloquy. Fine. More for me.

The OFF-SITE is a born provocateur. She blends the dirty fun of a PowerPoint presentation with the raw danger of a Kaffeeklatsch. One minute she's showing you charts and graphs, then up pops a "Far Side" cartoon. It's high-stakes poker, and everything's wild.

The SYMPOSIUM is the whisper, the roar, the battlements mounted, the thousand arrows raining down. Invade her castle keep, drag her wriggling into the sun, and still she curses you, spits at you, her topaz eyes ablaze. You force her down to a cobbler's bench, but ho, a hidden blade! She thrusts, and you are tumbling, flailing, tasting naught but your own reckless blood.

The conference is a demanding mistress. If you lose yourself in her endless serpent's dance, I can promise you heartache. I also promise you joy, joy beyond measure, leaping delirious joy!

And now, I die. ♦

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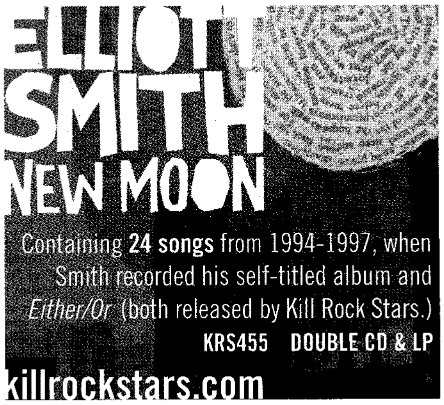

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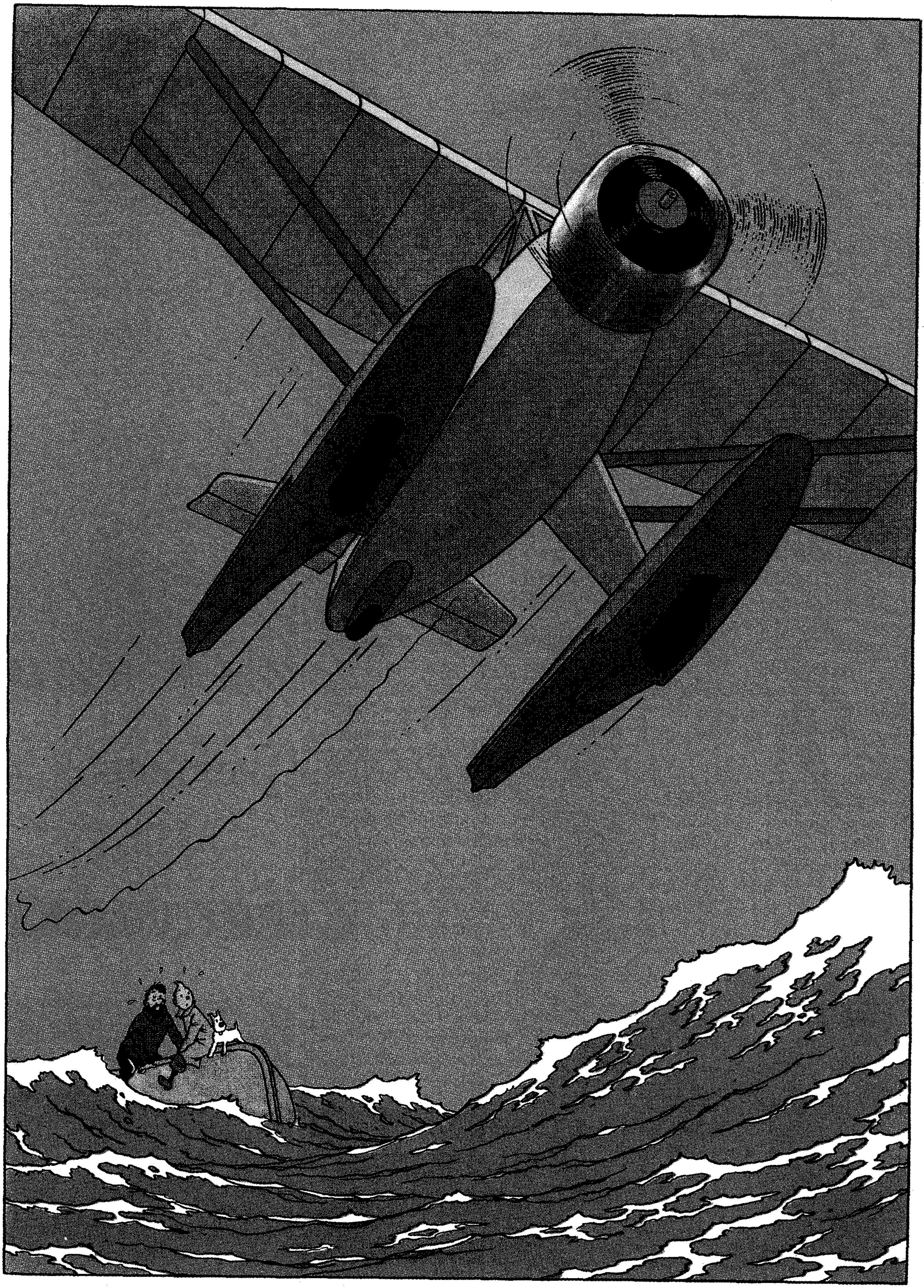
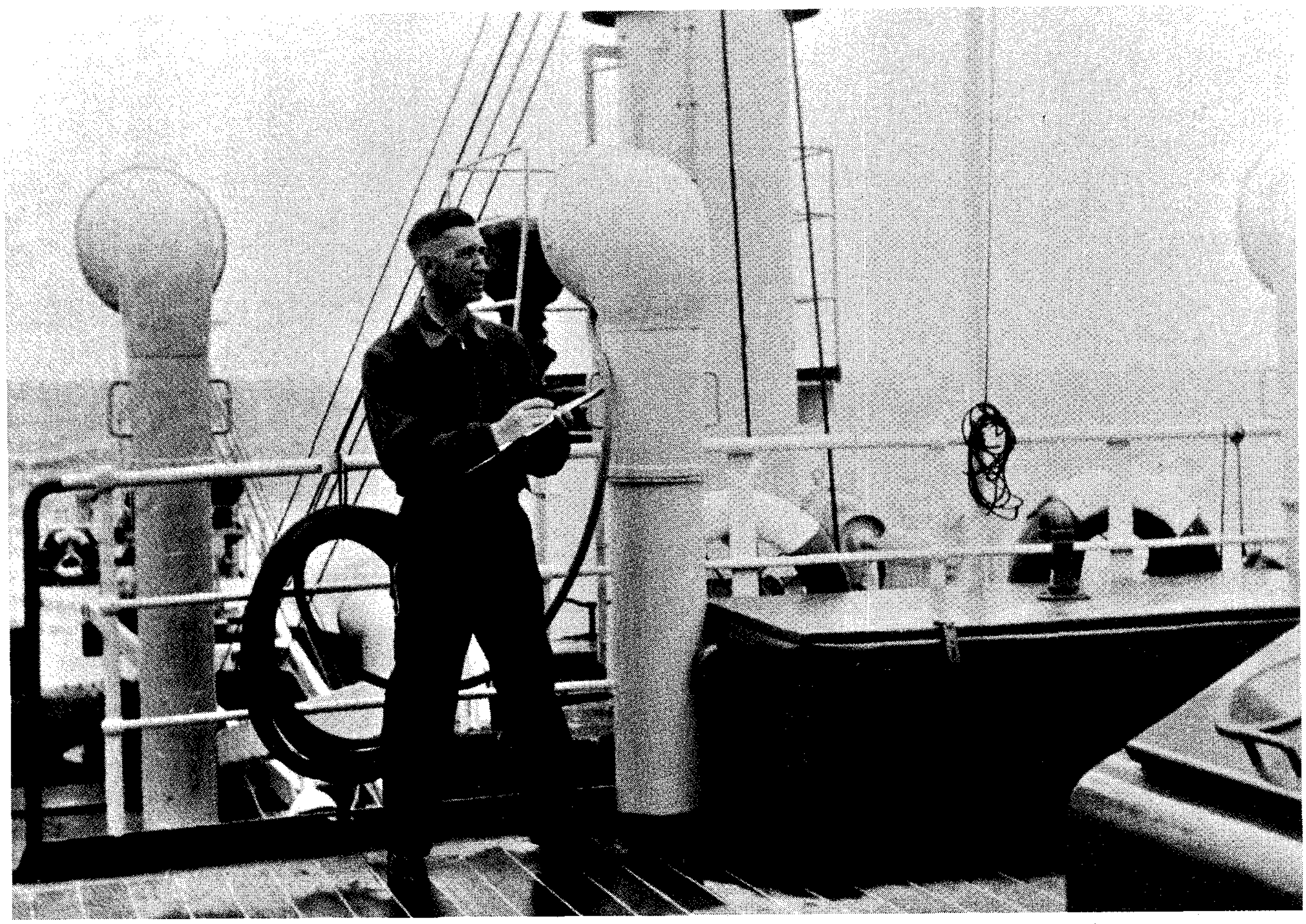


Hergé, and a frame from "The Crab with the Golden Claws" (1941), the book in which Tintin meets Captain Haddock.



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A CRITIC AT LARGE

A BOY'S WORLD

The Tintin century.

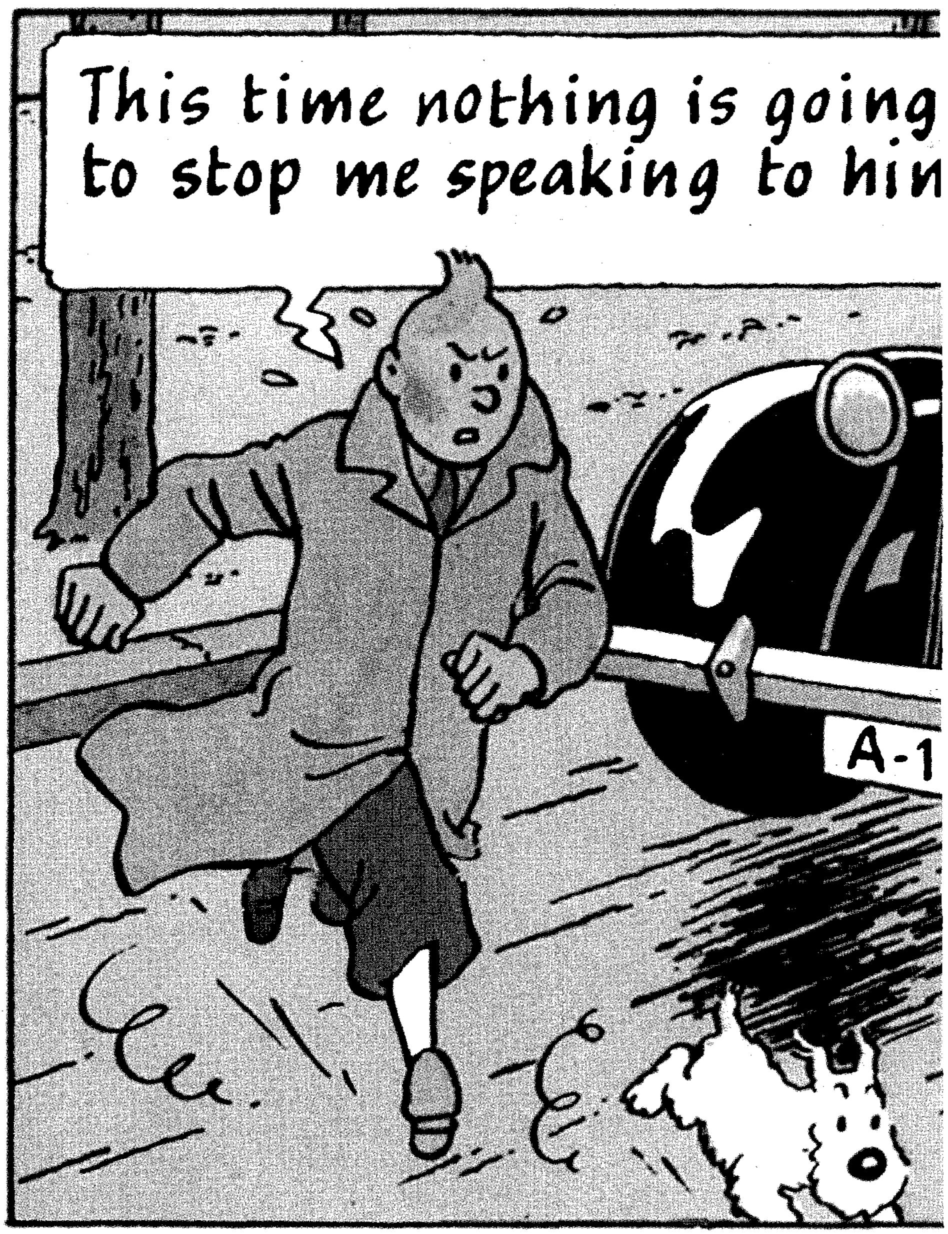
BY ANTHONY LANE

A hundred years ago, on May 22, 1907, a child named Georges Remi came into being. He was born in the Etterbeek district of Brussels, which is about as quiet a start in life as any person can have. Four years earlier and sixty miles away, in Liège, another Georges was born, a countryman of Remi's named Simenon, of equally unremarkable origins. Yet each man would, in his unobtrusive way, conquer the world. Simenon became the author of more than four hundred books, including seventy-five novels featuring Maigret, the wisest and least judgmental of detectives. In his novice years, he often wrote under the pseudonym of Georges Sim, and Georges Remi, likewise, preferred a shrunken name, although in his case the diminution stuck. He took his initials, switched them around, and ended up with R.G., which a Frenchman—or a French-speaking Belgian—would pronounce as Hergé. He devised his own investigator: younger than Maigret, more geographically thrusting, and far less fond of the bottle, but imbued by his creator with a similar, lightly borne air of moral purpose. His name was Tintin, and to date some two hundred million copies of his adventures have been sold.

There are twenty-three complete Tintin books, ranging from "Tintin in the Land of the Soviets" (1930) to "Tintin and the Picaros" (1976). They are comic books, and Tintin is the cheery, footloose hero of them all, his bravery just this side of recklessness and his constant companion a small white mutt named Snowy. Each book began, like a Victorian novel, in serialized form, the plot unfolding—or left judiciously hanging—in the pages of a newspaper or a magazine. To the majority of his uncountable fans, however, in more than forty languages, Tintin means a book: a slender object of desire, as large as a file folder but as jewelled in its coloring as an illuminated Psalter, and so clearly unwordy that even the least bookish of children will feel that they are holding something more delicious than burdensome. To receive a copy in hardback, as opposed to softcover, was, in my childhood, a gift beyond compare. At boarding school, Tintins were the rarest kind of contraband; just to add to the mystery, we were forbidden to read them except in the sickroom, and there must be others besides me who were left with the Proustian suspicion that illness, however painful, was not without its joys, and with the feverish memory of lying there, propped up, hearing the noise of a normal school day swell and recede below, and plunging instead into the far more extravagant, unregulated life of the boy reporter and his dog.

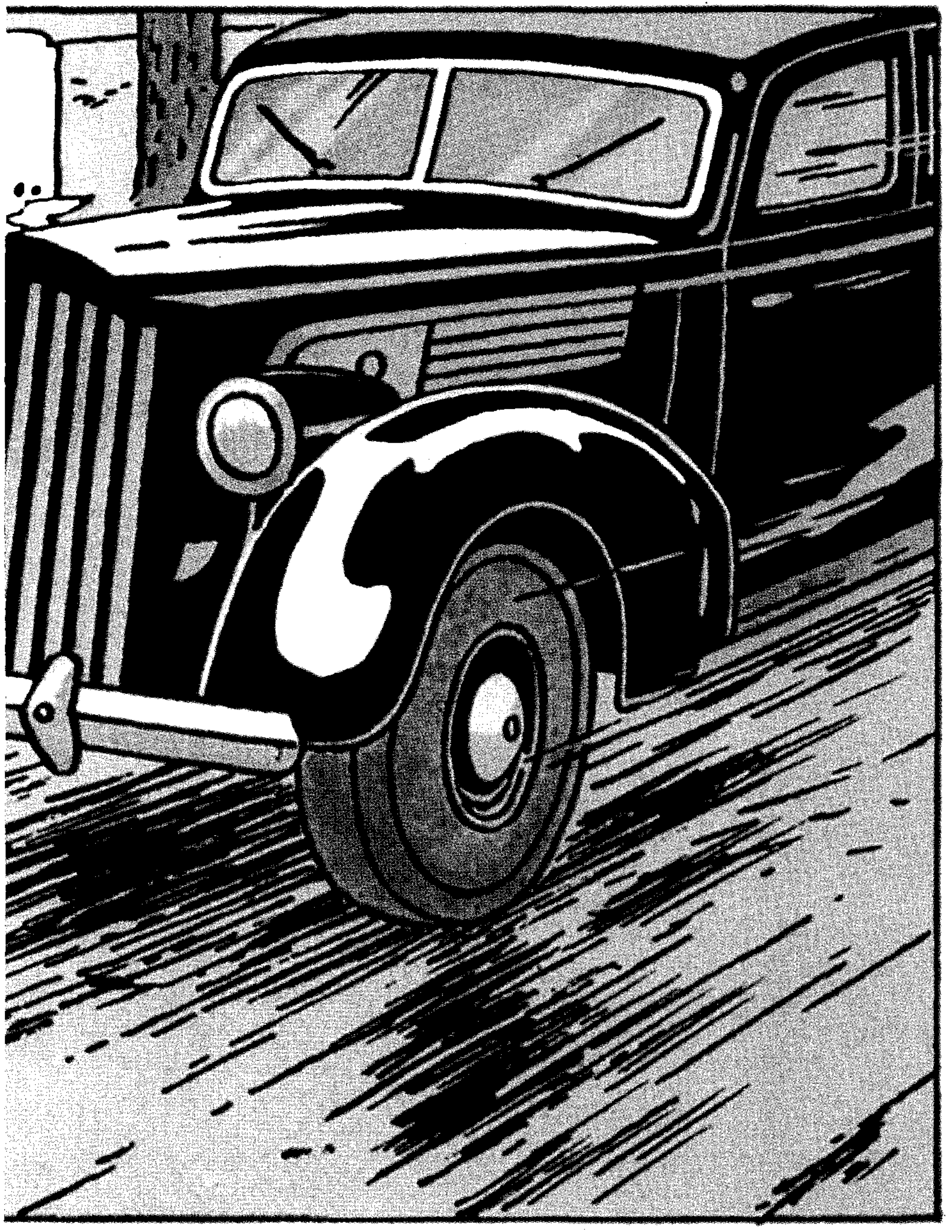
Tintin addicts are a mixed bunch. Last week, Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson, the director of "The Lord of the Rings," announced a three-picture deal to bring Tintin to the big screen. I once heard Hugh Grant declare on a radio program that if he could take only one book to a desert island it would be "King Ottokar's Sceptre" (1939). The same work, which takes place in the imaginary kingdom of Syldavia, was described to me by Timothy Garton Ash, a British historian steeped in the culture of the Balkans, as one of the most acute parodies ever written—or drawn—of the region's nationalist politics. General de Gaulle declared that Tintin was his only international rival—he was envious, perhaps, not just of Tintin's fame but of the defiantly positive attitude that he came to represent. (Both figures can be recognized by silhouette alone.) The French have half claimed Tintin as one of their own, and earlier this year the Pompidou Center, in Paris, mounted a major Hergé show. On the outside of the museum, draped down the full six-story height of the building, was a red-and-white rocket with a long, explosive plume. If you had read "Destination Moon" (1953) or "Explorers on the Moon" (1954), you would recognize that rocket instantly, and would know that its nose was pointing not only at the stars above but toward an area no less ripe for exploration. It was going to Tintinland.

How to describe the place? "A fictive universe which is as coherent, and as closed in on itself, as the world of Balzac." That is the view proposed, in "The Metamorphoses of Tintin" (1984), by Jean-Marie Apostolidès, who states that the hero of the early stories "annihilates himself in the absolute," which may be another way of saying that he keeps falling through trapdoors. Hergé has never been short of commentators, who are both enticed and (although they would not admit as much) exasperated by the care and calmness of his art—by how little it gives away and by how much, to their prying eyes, it must therefore be concealing. In "Tintin and the Secret of Literature," published last year, the British artist and novelist Tom McCarthy plots an enjoyable course through the corpus, helped on his way by Baudelaire, Sartre, Derrida, Freud, and the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, whose name could easily belong to an Hergé villain. For McCarthy, Tintin—in particular the Tintin who gazes out from the cover of "The Castafiore Emerald" (1963), shushing the reader with a finger held to his lips—is "the protector of the ultimate meaning held irretrievably in reserve." And you thought you were reading a comic book.


This time nothing is going to stop me speaking to hi
A-1

With books like "King Ottokar's Sceptre" (1939), Hergé moves into the territory of Joh

On one level, the growing band of exegetes—Tintinologists, as they are called—know that they are playing an overheated game, toying to the point of comic surfeit with a set of kids' stories that are intended to be funny. In McCarthy's words, "The Tintin books remain both unrivalled in their complexity and depth *and* so simple, even after more than half a century, that a child can read them with the same involvement as an adult." I would say that the child's involvement has a credulous freshness that the adult, for all the critical tools at his or her disposal, will strive in vain to recapture, but McCarthy is right to point up the simplicity of Hergé's achievement. There is infinite variety in the settings of the Tintin books—he journeys to landscapes as disparate as Peru, Scotland, Egypt, Tibet, and the pitted lunar surface—and yet what keeps the tales intact, and prevents them from splintering into travelogues, is the unifying presence of our hero, plus that select squadron of characters who recur from book to book, and who warm even the most exotic scenes with their foolish familiarity.



Buchan, Graham Greene, and the Ruritanian fantasies of Anthony Hope.

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Most important, there is Captain Haddock, a bearded sailor, who, as we learn from “The Secret of the Unicorn” (1943), which recounts the legend of his seventeenth-century forebear, has the sea in his blood, although the salt may long since have been flushed away by the contending flood of alcohol. At his earliest meeting with Tintin, in “The Crab with the Golden Claws” (1941), the Captain is little more than a lush, with a drunkard's unthinking bravado but few other virtues; as is so often the case, it took the author a while to realize the potential of his own creation. (P. G. Wodehouse wrote of Jeeves, “I still blush to think of the off-hand way I treated him at our first encounter.”) Haddock proved indispensable as a roistering comic foil, forever issuing the same polysyllabic curses (“Billions of blue blistering barnacles!”), and he is still there, pipe in mouth, on the final page of “Tintin and the Picaros,” thirty-five years after his début.

There are other figures who acquire the relentlessness of the leitmotif—striking when they first appear, dangerously close to tedious as you realize that, like eager party guests, they are never going to leave, yet somehow growing funny again through that undaunted capacity for repetition. I am thinking of Professor Calculus, Hergé's benign twist on the loony scientist, vast of brain and hard of hearing; Bianca Castafiore, the opera singer whose embonpoint fights for supremacy with the punishing force of her coloratura; Jolyon Wagg, the insurance salesman and archetype of the hearty bore, roaring at his own good humor as he invades the space of more retiring souls; and Thomson and Thompson, the hapless detectives who come with their own built-in repetition, each being almost a mirror image of the other. A single letter keeps them apart: to French readers they are Dupont and Dupond, to Spanish Hernandez and Fernandez, and to Afrikaners (who call Haddock “Kaptein Sardijn”) Uys and Buys. Arabic-speaking Tintinophiles know them as Tik and Tak.

The detectives' initial act, on the fourth page of “Cigars of the Pharaoh” (1934), is to arrest Tintin for suspected drug smuggling. Once that misunderstanding is ironed out, they become both a perpetual annoyance—tripping from one tale to the next, often worsening the scrapes in which Tintin finds himself—and a ridiculous double talisman. He is invariably glad to see them, and so are we, in the way that we relish the company of our most mockable relatives; when they fail to show up in “Tintin in Tibet” (1960), one of Hergé's finest projects, we vaguely miss their presence, regretting that they are unable to join the fray. They like to don disguises, especially national costumes, yet camouflage has the effect of making the pair look more, not less, conspicuous, and they tend to revert to their basic outfit: black bowler hat, mustache, dark suit, and pratfall-enhancing cane. How did this look arise? Hergé admitted, in an interview in 1971, that his father, Alexis, had a twin brother who copied him in every particular, including headgear and facial hair. “My father had a cane, my uncle went and bought the same one,” he recalled, then added, “What's odd is that I never gave a second's thought to them when creating Thomson and Thompson. But the coincidence is strange, all the same." So it is.

Hergé was a product of the solid Catholic bourgeoisie, educated at Saint-Boniface school in Brussels. Harry Thompson, one of his biographers, starts his second chapter with the heading "Hergé and the Unbelievably Dull Childhood," and, indeed, what follows is quite hypnotizing in its lack of drama, let alone of glamour. Hergé performed well at school, although, as he later claimed, "if you believe my parents, I was only really well-behaved when I had a pencil in my hand and a piece of paper." He added, "I couldn't tell a story except in the form of a drawing." Notice, from the start, the emphasis on plot. Within the Tintin books, there are compositions so perfect, so uncluttered, that they have been inflated from two or three square inches to poster size, yet it would be hard to find a single frame that does not either set a scene or notch the tale forward, as precisely as the cog of a gear.

Such stimulation as there was in Hergé's youth came from his exploits as a Scout. A proto-Tintin by the name of Totor appeared in a cartoon strip that Hergé drew for a journal called *Le Boy-Scout Belge*, and there remains, in the developed character, a trace of the try-anything, do-gooding spirit of the Scout troop. The troop itself, however, has long since faded; Tintin has a number of friends, most of them disturbingly weird, yet essentially he acts alone, with only his pet as a sidekick. As the books progress, he becomes a kind of hyperscout, so determined never to be bored that, not content with seeking or initiating thrills, he appears to attract them by some inherent force of narrative gravity. There are twelve frames on the first page of "The Black Island" (1938), three across by four down. In the first, our hero is walking along a country road, with Snowy chasing a butterfly at his side. The pastoral interlude lasts exactly one frame. In the next, a sound breaks the peace ("RRRR PFTT PFTT"), and by the twelfth frame Tintin is lying face down in a field with a bullet in him and Snowy barking at a departing airplane. In short, things fall over themselves to happen to Tintin, who is what all boys both love and dread becoming: a magnet for trouble.

In 1925, Hergé, his studies completed, went to work for *Le Vingtième Siècle*, or the *Twentieth Century*, a daily whose guiding principles—it was described on its masthead as a "Catholic and National Newspaper of Doctrine and Information"—bore the stamp of less tolerant times. The editor was an energetic right-wing clergyman named Father Norbert Wallez, who kept a framed photograph of Mussolini on his desk. In 1928, Hergé was deputized to edit the children's supplement, *Le Petit Vingtième*, which appeared every Thursday. On January 10, 1929, there was an announcement:

> *Le Petit Vingtième*, always keen to satisfy its readers and to keep them abreast of what is happening abroad, has just sent into Soviet Russia one of its best reporters: Tintin!

And there he was: a kid in a striped tie and checked suit, boarding a train with a dog. The checks made no effort to follow the curve of the clothes, being simply imposed in a grid pattern—a rebuke to perspective, and a first sign of the bracing flatness that we associate with the classic Tintin image, unhampered by fuss. Clarity is administered like a punch. Happiest of all is the incident on page 8, which will shape our hero for all time: he leaps down from a tree into the front seat of a car and speeds off, with the windy force of acceleration blowing his forelock back into a quiff. And there it stays, a never-breaking wave, as stiff as a unicorn's horn, for the rest of his days, as if to remind us of that primordial thrill.

The Soviet Union was no random destination. Father Wallez wanted Tintin, the mascot of impressionable Catholic minds, to use his first assignment to uncover the perilous scourge of Bolshevism. Whether young Belgians had a genuine thirst for spiritual propaganda is hard to tell; at any rate, so successful was the rookie reporter that, for his return from the Red menace, on May 8, 1930, an actor was hired to grease his hair, put on Russian clothes, and step off a train in Brussels into an adoring throng. The fact that, officially, Tintin did not exist, that he lived in two rather than three dimensions, and that he had been dreamed up by a man named Remi, who walked some distance behind "Tintin" at the station, put no damper on the day.

Tintin was launched, and his next port of call was still more provocative. For years, the result, "Tintin in the Congo" (1931), was unavailable, and no wonder. (Its eventual reappearance in a magazine in Zaire may be an irony too discomforting for Western readers.) The book is an unmitigated parade of racial prejudice, with bug-eyed natives swaying between ignorance and laziness. Hergé redrew it in 1946, but without changing such scenes as a black woman on her knees, bowing to Tintin (who has just given her husband quinine) and crying, "White man very great! . . . Has good spirits. . . . Him cure my husband! . . . White mister is big juju man!" Back comes the reply: "We're the tops, aren't we just?"—delivered not by Tintin but by Snowy, whose thoughts are bubbled like speech. Not only is the white man superior to the races that he rules; so is his dog.

Hergé did alter the lesson that Tintin teaches to a classroom of Congolese children. In the later version, it is mathematics. In my facsimile copy of the original, as printed in *Le Petit Vingtième*, our hero, introduced by a Catholic priest, points to a blackboard and begins, "My dear friends, I am going to talk to you today about your country: Belgium!" Behind that exclamation mark lurks a saga of appropriation and enslavement that, even by the standards of European incursions into Africa, took cruelty to bewildering extremes. (It is often the most placid and orderly of nations that give rise to the most unfettered of distant colonies, as if requiring a jungle in which to unleash their communal id.) The Belgian Congo had been born as an idea, and thus grabbed as a usable possession, in the last quarter of the previous century; it owed its allegiance to Leopold II, the King of Belgium, who never went near the place, and who grew rich on African rubber. Those who refused to toil for the regime were summarily punished; in 1899, an American Presbyterian missionary reported finding more than eighty severed human hands being smoked like hams over a fire. This was the comic paradise in which Tintin larked.

What matters about the early Tintin books is not just the attitudes that they enshrine—Hergé claimed that his concept of the Congo, which remained under Belgian rule until 1960, was no different from that of his compatriots at the time—but the steps that he then took to shrug off his xenophobia. A crucial happening, in this respect, was his encounter, in 1934, with Chang Chong-chen, a student at the

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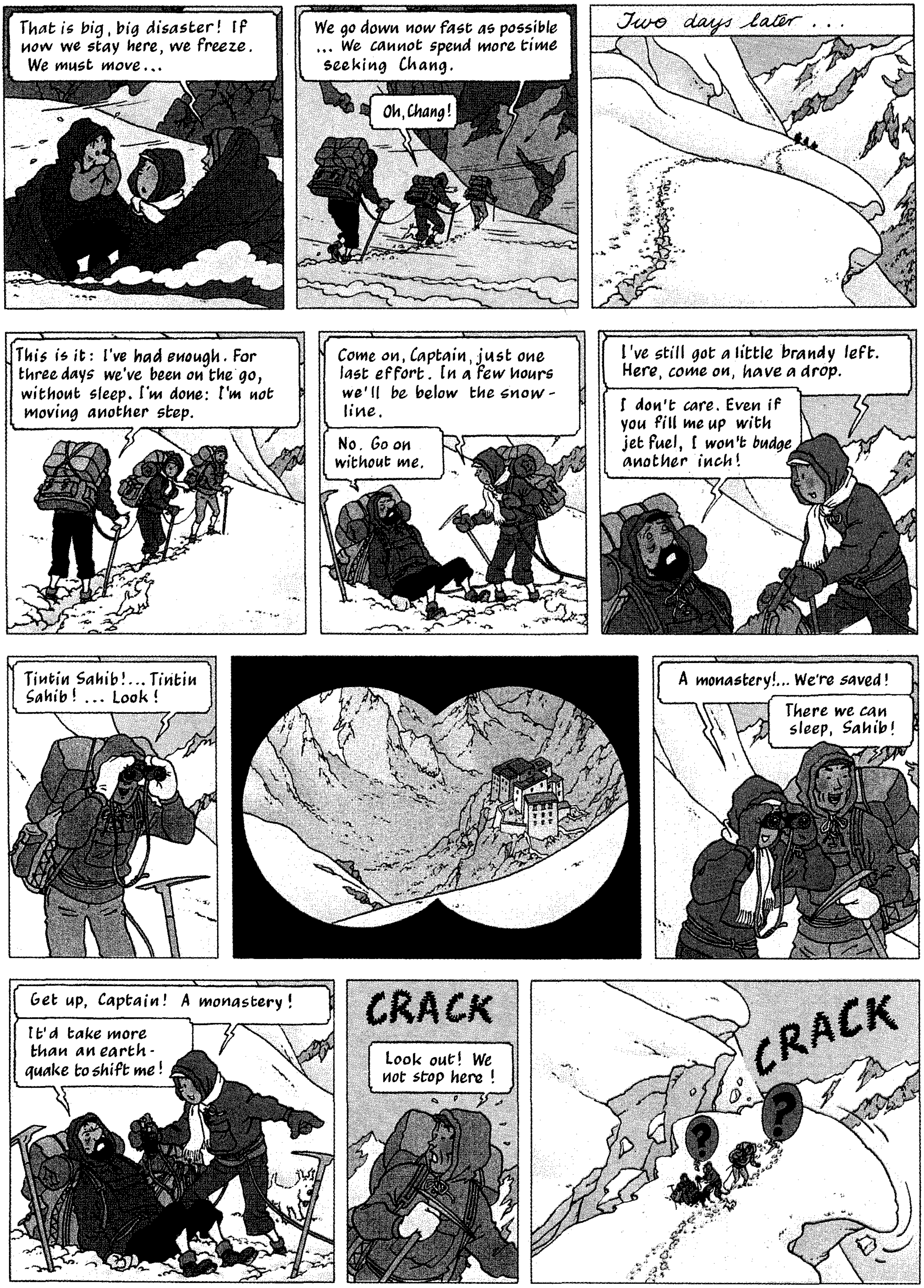

That is big, big disaster! If now we stay here, we freeze. We must move...
We go down now fast as possible ... We cannot spend more time seeking Chang.
Oh, Chang!
Two days later ...
This is it: I've had enough. For three days we've been on the go, without sleep. I'm done: I'm not moving another step.
Come on, Captain, just one last effort. In a few hours we'll be below the snow-line.
No. Go on without me.
I've still got a little brandy left. Here, come on, have a drop.
I don't care. Even if you fill me up with jet fuel, I won't budge another inch!
Tintin Sahib!... Tintin Sahib! ... Look!
A monastery!... We're saved!
There we can sleep, Sahib!
Get up, Captain! A monastery!
It'd take more than an earth-quake to shift me!
CRACK
Look out! We not stop here!
CRACK
?
?

In "Tintin in Tibet" (1960), Tintin searches for his friend Chang. The real Chang helped Hergé make his work more true to life.

Brussels Academy of Fine Arts. Hergé had declared his interest in China as a plausible setting for a Tintin tale, and he needed an adviser. Many years later, Chang recalled their coalescence:

> We were like two brothers. I suggested to him that to use real events as the inspiration for his adventures would be a better idea . . . the oeuvre would have a historical value, divested of pure fantasy and artificial sentiments. Thus "The Blue Lotus" was born.

The book came out in 1936, and with it emerged the principle that would both drive and stabilize Hergé's efforts for the rest of his life. It is an ethic that the Flaubert of "Salammbô" would recognize: the farther your reach, whether into the past or across continents, the more compelling your duty to get it right. You or I may not know what a chorten is, but Hergé knew: it is a Buddhist monument, and he would not be able to embark on "Tintin in Tibet" without amassing photographs of monasteries, lamas, and, yes, chortens, all of which would be copied in fanatical detail in the book. The same held true for every other region, as for every automobile and airplane, that he presumed to depict. It is as though he went in terror of improvisation, because he knew where—in the case of the Belgian Congo—ignorance had led. This is not to ascribe any gnawing shame to Hergé but merely to suggest that he redeemed his transgression in the only way that an artist can—namely, with pencil and pen, banishing technical error and hoping that other, larger injustices would disappear in turn. Hergé remained indebted to Chang, who returned to China, and with whom he lost contact for years. In 1960, "Tintin in Tibet" showed Tintin searching desperately for a friend named Chang in the yeti-haunted snows, and in 1981, two years before Hergé died, the real Chang came to Belgium for a tearful reunion. He had shown Hergé how to beat back prejudice: Don't flare up, cry vengeance, or launch competing theories. Just tell the truth.

IN PRISON

In prison
without being accused

or reach your family
or have a family   You have

conscience
heart trouble

asthma
manic-depressive

(we lost the baby)
no meds

no one
no window

black water
nail-scratched walls

your pure face turned away
embarrassed

you
who the earth was for.

—*Jean Valentine*

That is why my favorite Tintin stories are those with their feet on the ground. They may be outlandish, but I like to recognize the lands in question, and the activities that unfold upon them. Give me rain, a running Tintin, the brewing of European intrigue, and the long, menacing hoods of enemy cars: at times like these, in "King Ottokar's Sceptre" and "The Calculus Affair" (1956), Hergé slots into position next to John Buchan, Graham Greene, and the Ruritanian fantasies of Anthony Hope. Conversely, whenever the fantastical looms, however splendid, my attention drops. I am keen to follow Tintin, for example, as he pursues a chunk of meteorite that has fallen into the Arctic Ocean, in "The Shooting Star" (1942), but once he steps onto the bobbing rock, and finds it brimming with giant spiders and sprouting toadstools the size of elephants, something in the story drowns. "The Land of Black Gold," similarly, is about a fight over oil supplies, but at the last gasp Thomson and Thompson swallow some bad tablets and wind up with floor-length green hair and green bubbles spewing from their lips.

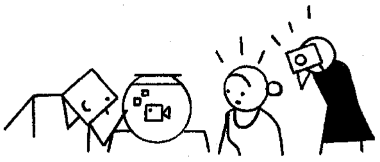
The Tintin books seem so blithe today, and their farcical mechanisms so well lubricated, that it is hard to imagine how they had to be mended and recast along the way. "The Land of Black Gold," for instance, appeared as a book in 1950, full of references to the Stern Gang and other cells of Jewish resistance against the British Mandate in Palestine. By the time it was revised, in 1971, these had all but vanished. Yet there had been an even earlier version, initiated in 1939 but dropped in May, 1940, not least because its central baddie was German. By then, Belgium was occupied, and *Le Vingtième Siècle* had shut down. Hergé, after brief military service and a spell in France, returned to his homeland and to a job at *Le Soir*, where, in September, 1941, the weekly ration of Tintin expanded to a daily strip. Under these new conditions, Hergé—like Wodehouse, who was interned as an enemy alien—not only survived but bloomed into one of his most flourishing periods. Once the war ended, both men were interrogated about the nature and intensity of their collaboration (*Le Soir* had been taken over by the occupiers); both pleaded guilty of innocence, and neither ever dispelled the shadow of suspicion.

There are two kinds of evidence against Hergé. The first is circumstantial: his acquaintance with Léon Degrelle, for example, a Tintin fan who founded Rex, the association of Belgian Fascists, became a decorated officer in the S.S., and devoted himself, after the war, to the cause of Holocaust denial. It was Degrelle who, years before, as a foreign correspondent for *Le Vingtième Siècle*, had sent a package of American comics to Brussels from Mexico, thus introducing Hergé to the delights of the Katzenjammer Kids and Krazy Kat. More damning is Bohlwinkel, the rapacious financier whom Hergé planted in "The Shooting Star," and who originally bore the name of Blumenstein; in a letter of 1954, the author, responding to a charge of anti-Semitism, placed him alongside "English colonists thrashing the Chinese, German merchants of sudden death, treacherous Japanese, terrible African sorcerers, Chicago gangsters," adding that he had nothing as a whole against "Yellows, Blacks, or Whites." Hergé himself was no villain; indeed, he became a joy-bringer of global renown. But his ability to dig himself into a hole of misconceptions, and to avert his gaze from evil, verges at times on the chronic.

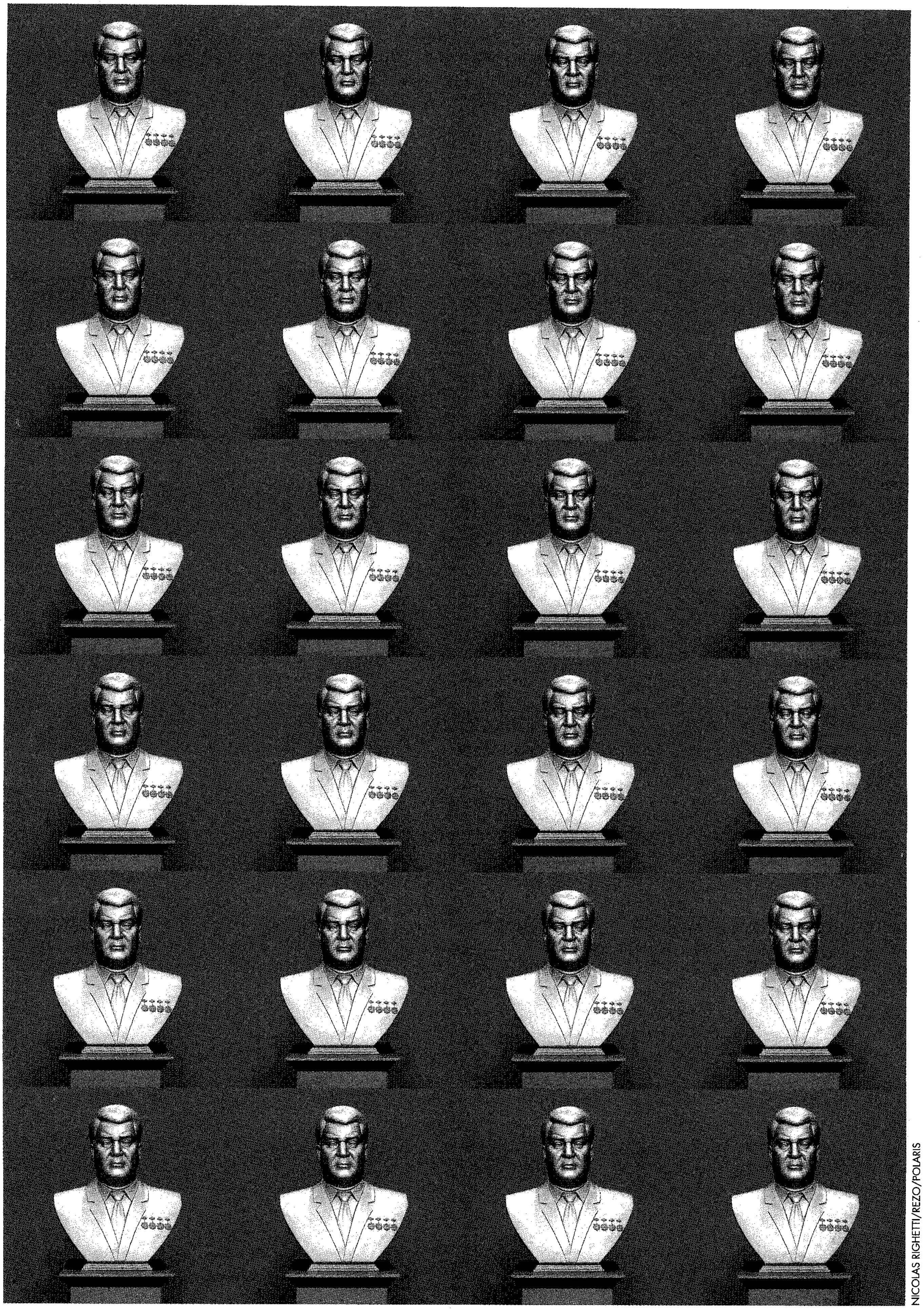
Or are we asking too much? Might children crave such ready aversion more than ever? Nobody could advocate the return of the blunt stereotypes in which Hergé dealt, but the dangers in which his hero gets trapped—excitingly mortal yet shorn of actual suffering—require no adjustment. Tintin seems ideally formed to glance off real history, catching and bruising himself on its corners; it's no surprise that Spielberg, the man who brought us Indiana Jones, should have declared an interest. Like Indy, Tintin has more than enough literal plunges to keep him busy; he seems to spend an inordinate amount of time on rockfaces and heaving decks, in tunnels or the cockpits of plummeting planes. You could try to count the number of times when walls, bookshelves, and other surfaces give way and yield up hidden passages, but you would go crazy, just as Tintin almost tears his quiff out trying to decipher the clues with which fate both bestrews and blocks his path. (Hergé, asked what he would have become if not an artist, replied, "*Spéléologue*," or spelunker.) After a mere eight pages of "The Crab with the Golden Claws," we find Tintin adding up the oddities that have arisen so far: "A tin + a drowned man + five counterfeit coins + Karaboudjan + a Japanese + a letter + a kidnapping = a real Chinese puzzle." There was also the magnifying glass that he mistook for a bone.

Such fetishistic love of objects would have pleased Hitchcock, as would the moment on the penultimate page of "The Secret of the Unicorn" when three scraps of paper, each of which has been tucked inside the mast of a model ship, are layered together and held up against the light, the palimpsest revealing the location of the *next* concealment—a pirate's hoard, to be unearthed in the sequel, "Red Rackham's Treasure" (1944). Tintinologists cannot get enough of these buried treasures, and I applaud Tom McCarthy for the logical rigor with which he deduces that the jewel embedded in the title of "The Castafiore Emerald" is, in fact, Bianca Castafiore's clitoris. Given that she is not only a diva, whose party piece is the "Jewel Song," from Gounod's "Faust," but a certifiable ball-breaker (Haddock quails at the sight of her), anything is possible.

Yet McCarthy's argument falters for one reason: there are no genitalia in Hergé's work, because there is no sex. Tintin passes increasing portions of his life with an unmarried seaman, yet it seldom occurs to us to question their rapport. Tintin never has a girlfriend, nor does he express the need for one, and that absence is part of his greater mystery. He has no parents or siblings. He has no children, of course, and we are unsure whether he counts as a child himself; like Peter Pan, the boy reporter never ages, being a person both of his time and buoyantly apart from it. He often dresses in plus fours, like a golfer of the nineteen-twenties, yet when he finally upgrades to flared brown jeans, in "Tintin and the Picaros," we feel embarrassed and betrayed on his behalf. If he reminds me of anyone, it is Charlie Brown. Both characters are more profoundly understood by their dogs than by any human. Both, indeed, are barely characters at all, being a bundle of unchanging qualities—courage and curiosity in one, hope and defeatedness in the other—allied to the simplest of graphic gestures. An oval, two dots, a line that sometimes widens to an O: such is Tintin's head, and at moments of stress or shock it is surrounded by a bizarre halo of flying drops, though whether these are symbolic or sweaty I can never decide.



He came here once, for "Tintin in America" (1932), but though the visit ended with a ticker-tape parade, it was not a success, for Tintin failed to root himself in the local imagination. He has sold in forty languages, and his questing has become a lingua franca, yet the United States has felt no widespread craving for his exploits. Spielberg will have his work cut out for him: Tintin may be too constrained for American tastes, being possessed of no superpowers, and with his earthly powers under tight restriction. He is Clark Kent without the phone booth, although Clark at least had a paying job, whereas Tintin, nominally a reporter, never receives a salary or files a story. If anyone here has warmed to the primary boldness of Hergé's colors, and to the confidence of his compositions, it is not child readers but grownup artists such as Warhol and Lichtenstein, both of whom admired him. (Warhol did Hergé's portrait on request.) In such spirited company, he can be viewed as a prophet of Pop, and that is how I revere him, too, decades after I lay in the sickroom and devoured his collected works. Hergé has long ceased to make me laugh, but he puts me into a blissful trance, in which the same old jokes and people, with minor variations, stream brightly across the page. In such a light, Thomson and Thompson are no longer bumbling detectives but clever co-conspirators of the bowler-hatted gentlemen who—as painted by Magritte, Hergé's fellow-Belgian—gather together, stand in contemplation, or drop in their hundreds from the sky. Out of the smallest countries come the strangest things. ♦



NICOLAS RIGHETTI/REZO/POLARIS

LETTER FROM TURKMENISTAN

THE GOLDEN MAN

Saparmurat Niyazov's reign of insanity.

BY PAUL THEROUX

Turkmenistan, from the time it gained independence from the Soviet Union, in 1991, until the end of 2006, was a tyranny, run by a madman, Saparmurat Niyazov. He died of heart failure last December, at the age of sixty-six, but while he lived he was one of the wealthiest and most powerful lunatics on earth. He treated Turkmenistan as his private kingdom, a land in which everything belonged to him, including the country's plentiful natural gas—much of which issued into the air from his own person in the form of interminable speechifying.

With the mountains of Iran and Afghanistan stacked up on its southern border, Turkmenistan was once a land of nomadic horse breeders in search of grazing pastures. It attracted conquerors—Alexander the Great, the Parthians, the Arabs, the Mongols—but because of its considerable size (it is almost a hundred and ninety thousand square miles), its inhospitable terrain, and its fierce tribalism it was not easily governed. Russia's first military expedition into the region, ordered in 1717 by Peter the Great, ended in disaster; the tsar's men were massacred by local khans. By the late-nineteenth century, though, the territory was under Russian control. The country did not have a defined border of its own until 1924, when it became a Soviet republic. "The Turkmen S.S.R. was always a backwater," a seasoned American diplomat told me. "It was the sleepiest, most remote, least favored of the U.S.S.R.'s republics." Niyazov, a career bureaucrat, was named First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmen S.S.R. by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, in 1991, he gave himself the name Turkmenbashi, "Leader of All the Turkmen," and put himself in charge.

I was lucky to get a visa to travel to Turkmenistan in the middle of last year, at a time when Turkmenbashi was still alive, and many of his people cringed at his name, he was jailing dissenters, and his roads were mostly closed to people like me. Turkmenbashi famously hated writers, and Turkmenistan, during his reign, was one of the hardest countries in the world for a solitary traveller to enter. Apart from its gas pipeline, it had few links to the rest of the world. Only the truly privileged had access to international phone service, the Internet, and cell phones. When I arrived, Internet cafés had been closed for more than three years. Newspapers, radio, and television were all under state control; there was no real local news and little access to news from elsewhere. My BlackBerry, which had worked in Baku, Azerbaijan, and in Tbilisi, Georgia, went dark. People tended to whisper when they spoke, and no wonder. In a typical case, reported by international sources, a fifty-eight-year-old journalist, Ogulsapar Muradova, a reporter for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a mother of three, had been arrested on a trumped-up charge, tried secretly without a lawyer, and given six years in jail. In September, a month after she was imprisoned, she was found dead (she appeared to have suffered a "head injury"), and her body was handed over to her daughters.

I took a fifty-minute flight from Baku to Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat, and passed, in the process—or so it seemed—through the looking glass. Few planes landed at the casino-like airport, which was staffed by officials with a very slim idea of how to do their jobs—a characteristic common to officials in most dictatorships, where fear of retribution inspires indecision and incompetence. Men in handsome uniforms stood around, delaying the processing of passengers, most of them foreign workers in the gas industry—British, Malaysian, Filipino. The officials grinned at one another, but when they met my gaze they glowered and looked fierce. One official, in a wide-crowned and shiny-visored cap, looked at me and sucked his teeth and said, "*Problyema.*"

"What's the problem?"

"*Shto eta?*" What is this? He tugged at the offending object in my bag. (He spoke Russian with me, although Turkmen is the official language of the country.)

"Icon," I said. It was a silver icon, with an oil portrait of Jesus staring out from a lozenge at the center, which I had bought at a flea market in Tbilisi and wrapped in a T-shirt so that it wouldn't get scratched.

"*Eta starinnaya,*" he said.

"No, it's new."

"*Ochen' dorogaya.*"

"Not really. It was cheap."

"*Antikvarnaya!*"

"An antique?"

"*Da. Problyema!*" he said. He showed me the flat of his hand. "*Zhdi zdyes'.*" Wait here.

I waited almost an hour. A team of men returned. One spoke English while the rest of them clucked approvingly.

"Why you bring this eekon here?" he said slowly. "Why you not bring it khome?"

"I am bringing it home," I said.

He raised his hands. "This Ashgabat, not khome."

"I'm on my way home," I said. Which was, in the larger sense, true. "To give this to my mother."

"*Mat',*" the man explained to the team. "It is for his mother."

Mention of one's mother is useful in such situations, particularly in a country whose leader, I was to discover, encouraged a cult of motherhood.

But the man seemed baffled as to what

Statues of Niyazov proliferated. "I don't find any pleasure in it, but the people demand it," he said.

to do next. I explained that, since a section of the customs form asked for "Description of Objects," we could fill out that portion, and I would show it at the border when I left, to prove that I wasn't smuggling antiques. He and his team seemed to think that this was an appropriate compromise, and so after two hours I was riding into Ashgabat.

The city was an example of what happens when absolute political power, money, and mental illness are combined. Turkmenbashi's acolytes had recently pronounced him the "national prophet," a harmless enough conceit if you're a civilian, but a pathological, if not fatal, one in a despot. In support of this claim, Turkmenbashi had written a sort of national Bible, called "Ruhnama" ("Book of the Soul"), and he regarded himself as an accomplished writer—a clear sign of madness in anyone. He had also recently built a vast space-age mosque, which he'd named after himself—Saparmurat Hajji Mosque—and he encouraged his people to visit it annually, in a kind of local hajj.

Ashgabat was filled with gold statues of Turkmenbashi. In these statues, which had an ecclesiastical aura, Bashi was El Dorado, the Man of Gold, all-powerful, all-knowing. People were meant not to gape at them but to venerate them. One revolving statue, showing Turkmenbashi with his arms raised, rotated according to the sun and seemed to guide it across the sky, from dawn to dusk. It stood upon a gigantic marble apparatus called the Neutrality Arch, which looked like—and was referred to by some as—a toilet-bowl plunger. Other statues showed him sitting, striding, waving, saluting, and smiling a twenty-four-karat smile. One even showed him as a precocious golden child, seated in the lap of his bronze mother. He once said to a journalist, "I admit it, there are too many portraits, pictures and monuments [of me]. I don't find any pleasure in it, but the people demand it because of their mentality." A statue of Lenin in Neutrality Square was bronze and life-size, its message "LENINISM IS THE WAY TO FREE THE PEOPLES OF THE EAST"; it was modest and charming by comparison. The irony of Ashgabat was that nowhere, among the gold statues and the white marble plazas, was there a place to sit down. It was a city without benches—the subtle message: *keep walking*.

There were also portraits of Turkmenbashi, several of them measuring hundreds of square feet, everywhere in Ashgabat. In some, he looked like a fat and grinning Dean Martin; in others, he was a truculent C.E.O. with a chilly smile. A common image showed him, chin on hand, squinting in insincere bonhomie, like a lounge singer. A heavy drinker, a bully, and a wearer of bling—two or three diamond rings on each hand—he had Italianate features, and was sometimes portrayed with a stack of books, like an author on a book tour.

"Ah, there you are, Simmons. Do come in!"

Everything Turkmenbashi did seemed to indicate that he was out of his mind. He'd had parliament declare him "President for Life"; it was the will of the people, his ministers had said. He'd banned beards and ballet; he'd denounced gold teeth as unhygienic. A London newspaper reported that he had renamed bread after his mother. No one I met in Ashgabat had heard about this, but he had done something even nuttier. He had renamed the months of the year—January after himself, and April for his mother. The days of the week and the names of the years were also new, Turkmenbashi's innovation. The year 2003 was named after his father, 2004 after his mother, and 2005 was "The Year of 'Ruhnama.' "

"He was on TV last night," my driver said. "Well, he's on almost every night." Turkmen almost never said Turkmenbashi's name aloud. "He said, 'If you read my book three times, you will go to Heaven.' "

"How does he know this?"

"He said, 'I asked Allah to arrange it.' "

"Ruhnama" is a farrago of memoir, Turkmen lore, potted history, dietary suggestions, Soviet-bashing, boasting, wild promises, and Turkmenbashi's poems. He seemed to regard it both as a sort of Koran and as a how-to guide for the Turkmen people, a jingoistic pep talk. In fact, it is little more than a soporific, "chloroform in print," as Mark Twain described "The Book of Mormon." I read it once. Turkmenbashi would have to promise more than Heaven for me to read it two more times.

In his confused and patchy exposition, Bashi reaches back five thousand years (or so he says). After the flood of Noah, he explains, the original ancestor of the Turkmen, Oguz Khan, emerged. Oguz's sons and grandsons produced Turkmenistan's twenty-four clans. The figure of Oguz is key to "Ruhnama"; his name, according to Bashi, was set upon many features of the earth and the sky. Turkmen called the Milky Way "the Oguz Arch," and the Amu Darya River "the Oguz River," and the constellation Taurus "the Oguz stars." Oguz also "implemented . . . the use of the national Oguz alphabet." "Ruhnama" might as well be subtitled "The Second Coming": Bashi sets himself up as a reincarnation of Oguz Khan, every bit as powerful and wise—which was why he chose to name cities, hills, rivers, and streets after himself and to dedicate his life to his country.

Turkmenbashi was an orphan. He makes much of this in the book, and the passages about his childhood have a clumsy tenderness. "I have borne many difficulties throughout my life," he writes. He tells how his father was killed in the Second World War, fighting for the Soviets in North Ossetia, and how, in 1948, when he was seven, his mother was killed in an earthquake that levelled much of Ashgabat. In adversity, Bashi was made stronger. "When I considered my situation, I understood that I was not an orphan!" he says. In place of parents, he had a nation and a cause—and, in Oguz Khan, a father in history. Later in the book, he waxes emotional about mothers. "The mother is a sacred being," he writes. "One can understand the value of sacred things only after one has lost them." He recalls a Turkmen saying—"Fatherless, I am orphan; motherless, I am captive"—and concludes, "Fate decreed two pains for me. I was both an orphan and a captive."

A lost childhood seems essential in a dictator's biography; it is a determining factor in the development of a political tyrant. As far as abandonment complaints go, "Ruhnama" resembles (sometimes almost word for word) the tale of the Austrian paperhanger in the first part of "Mein Kampf," who wrote, "In my thirteenth year I suddenly lost my father. . . . When my mother died, Fate, at least in one respect, had made its decisions." But the orphaning is more sentimentalized in Bashi's book, and the list of obligations and duties he provides for the Turkmen people includes the not exactly Hitlerian "Maintain a smiling face." Turkmenbashi was emphatic about smiling. "A smile can make a friend for you out of an enemy," he writes. "When death stares you in the face, smile at it and it may leave you untouched." Smiling is a form of conversation: "Talk to each other with smiles." It is a way of delaying aging: " 'There will never be any wrinkles on a smiling face,' as the saying goes." And, in memory, it is a source of comfort to him: "I often remember my mother. Her smile . . . is visible to me in the dark of night, even if I have my eyes shut." This was perhaps why many of the portraits of Bashi showed him with a smile, though he never looked less amused than when he was grinning; his smile—and this may be true of all political leaders—was his most sinister feature.

At Bashi's command, "Ruhnama" is studied in all the schools of Turkmenistan; a thorough knowledge of it is still an entry requirement for colleges and universities and for advancement in the civil service. (Elections held in February, which were widely criticized as neither free nor fair, brought to power Bashi's former Deputy Prime Minister Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov. Berdimuhammedov promised to stay true to the spirit of his predecessor, and, since then, conditions in Turkmenistan have changed little.) The immigration officials who gave me a hard time had little idea how to handle a simple customs matter, but they probably could have quoted "A smile can make a friend for you out of an enemy."

In the memoir parts of "Ruhnama," Bashi fails to mention that, after overcoming the difficulties of his childhood and completing his education in Leningrad (he studied electrical engineering), he became a party hack. In the nineteen-seventies and eighties, he rose through the ranks to the Soviet Politburo. He was one of the educated provincials who Gorbachev hoped might serve as agents of reform. Also not mentioned in "Ruhnama" is the fact that Bashi spent a great deal of time in Leningrad and Moscow, or that he married a Russian, who lived apart from him, in Moscow, or that he had a son and a daughter who lived out of the country. (Turkmenbashi's son, Murat, was reportedly one of the people vying to replace him after his death.)

Another significant omission in recent editions of "Ruhnama" (more than a million copies have reportedly been printed, in more than thirty languages, including Zulu and Japanese, and in Braille) is any mention of the assassination attempt against Bashi. In 2002, in what was possibly a failed coup, he was shot at as his motorcade sped through Ashgabat. This attack resulted in a wave of repression; the alleged perpetrators and their helpers were hunted down and either killed or imprisoned. Whole families were jailed, and nothing was heard of them afterward. The word was that some disgruntled and ambitious former officials had schemed to get rid of Turkmenbashi. The caper failed, but it understandably enhanced his paranoia; his delusions of grandeur were joined by delusions of persecution. He ordered a clampdown on what was already limited contact with the outside world, and stripped the country of the few freedoms that remained. He also intensified another inconvenient feature of most tyrannies: roadblocks. These were installed throughout all Turkmen cities and every few miles on the roads leading out of those cities. On an eight-mile journey to see some ruins, I was stopped three times by well-armed men in spiffy uniforms who didn't have the slightest notion of what to do with the cars they stopped. They examined papers, they looked into back seats, they scowled and shouldered their rifles, but really they were foxed.

I made the trip to the ruins with two Turkmen I'd met through a mutual friend, who told me that they knew something of Turkmen history: a man I'll call Mamed, whose English was shaky, and a woman I'll call Gulnara, who was fluent. In the car, I asked them about Turkmenbashi's passion for renaming. They told me that he had made so many changes they were unable to keep the names straight.

"January is now Turkmenbashi," Gulnara said. "February is Baýderk—the flag. March is Nowruz. April is Gurbansoltan Eje—his mother. June is Oguz—our hero. But May is . . . What is May?"

Mamed said, "May is Sanjar."

"No, that's November."

"Are you sure?"

"I know September is Ruhnama," Gulnara said.

"August is Alp Arslan," Mamed said. "He was sultan."

"You forgot July," Gulnara said.

"I don't remember July. What is it?"

Gulnara shook her head. She squinted and said, "Then there's October."

Mamed said, "Garaşsyzlyk."

"Independence," Gulnara said.

They were just as vague on the days of the week, though Gulnara started confidently, "Monday is Bashgün—Main Day. Tuesday is Yashgün, Young Day. Wednesday is Hoshgün."

"Tuesday is Hoshgün," Mamed said. "Wednesday is Yashgün."

"I don't think so," Gulnara said.

Their confusion was funny but odd, given that by government decree all ministries, schools, colleges, the police, the Army, and all citizens had not only to demonstrate a knowledge of the changes but to use them, too.

"He renamed ketchup," Gulnara said. "He made a big speech. 'Why do we say "ketchup"? This is a foreign word. We are Turkmen. We must have a Turkmen word for this!' "

"So what is it?"

"Ketchup is *ümech*."

"If I looked up *ümech* in a Turkmen-English dictionary, what would it say?"

"It would say 'ketchup,' except we don't have any new dictionaries in Turkmenistan."

All this talk of their obsessive President made Mamed and Gulnara self-conscious, and when they fell silent I said, "Does it bother you that the President has made all these changes?"

"Most people don't think about it," Gulnara said. She meant, Most people don't want to think about it, because it will only make them miserable.

"What about the gold statues of himself that he puts up?"

Mamed made a face, shook his head, and became suddenly alert. It was said that hotel rooms and offices were bugged. Surely his car could be bugged, too?

But Gulnara had an opinion. She was confident and bright, qualities that she shared with many of the Turkmen women I met. She said, "The statues. The slogans. The five-year plans. We have seen this before. Stalin—and others. This will pass away."

It was, it seemed to me, the right way to view the autocracy, for of course this domineering man would die, and likely sooner rather than later—he was seriously afflicted with heart disease, possibly caused by diabetes, and had undergone at least one bypass operation. In the meantime, Turkmen often expressed their disaffection through jokes. "Why is Turkmenbashi the richest man in Turkmenistan?" Answer: "Because he has five million sheep."

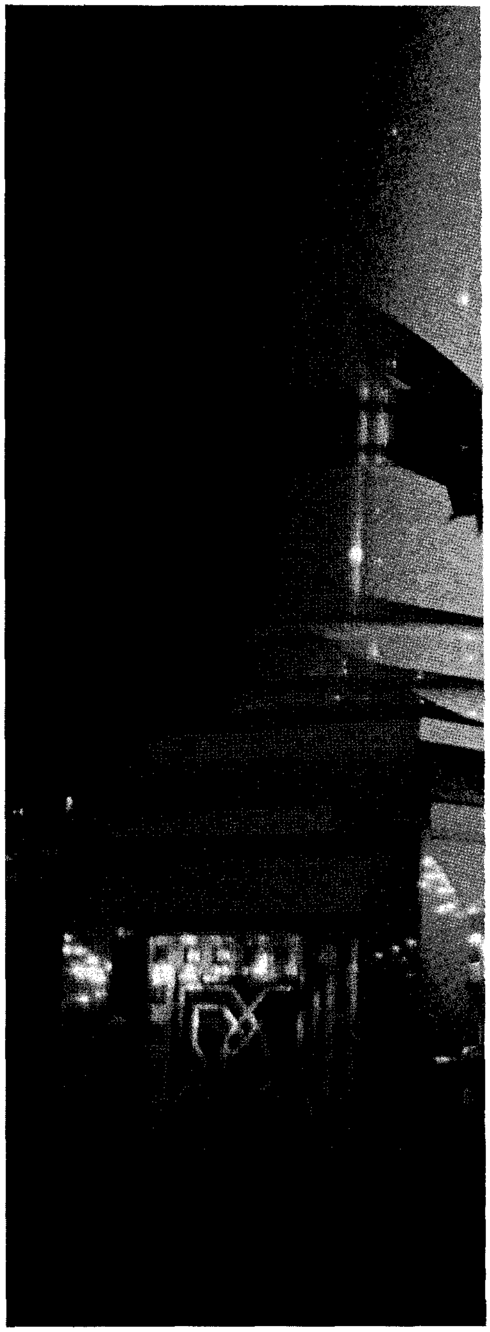
We had passed a number of state-owned vineyards. One of the oddities of Turkmenistan—which first encountered Islam in the seventh century and is now almost ninety per cent Muslim—was its vigorous wine industry, both for export and for local consumption. Turkmen Muslims, at least the ones I met in Ashgabat, were for the most part moderate in their faith and had a surprising taste for wine. Turkmenbashi himself, who had made the hajj, was also a notorious boozer.

At the edge of the desert, we approached some rising ground, more a mound than a hill, on which there was a broken structure of mud bricks. This was Anau, the ruins of a fifteenth-century mosque, which strangely showed a Chinese architectural influence. In its bright mosaics, there was imagery that I had never seen before in Islamic art, and over the archway of the entrance were some fragments of a still sinuous dragon.

Much of Turkmenistan is desert wasteland, scrubby bushes, and dusty boulders; lizards skitter through a landscape like cat litter. In Soviet times, Turkmenistan's few towns and cities were outposts, as benighted as those of any imperial colony, where people in colorful clothes surrendered their reserves of gas and oil to the Russian overlords. This exploitation was one of the injustices denounced in "Ruhnama." But the dragon on the mosque was a reminder that this part of Turkmenistan had also been on the Silk Road, the route to China, and that some of the toughest travellers of history, some of the boldest generals, and the largest armies had passed this way. The mosque was still a place of pilgrimage, because its grounds contained the tomb of Seyyed Jamaluddin, the father of a local governor from the fifteenth century. A dozen people, most of them women with children, were praying at the pile of broken bricks that was his grave.

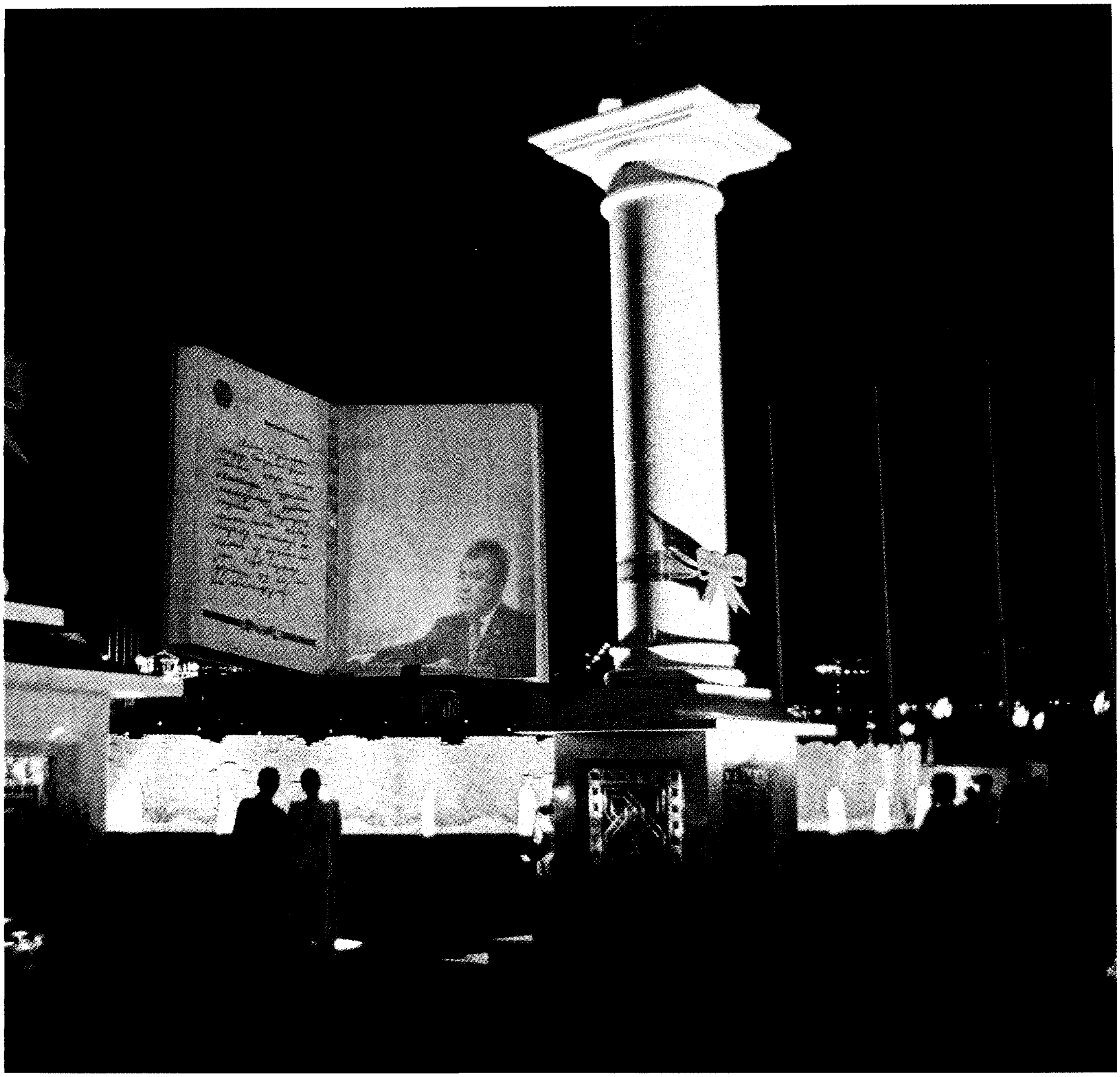
"They come because he has good communication with Allah," Mamed said.

There was another grave, the Tomb of the Unmarried Woman—Gulnara said that "unmarried woman" could also be translated as "virgin." Young women were praying here. Hundreds more had left behind requests to be granted. Small carved cradles indicated a woman's wish to be blessed with babies. Gulnara said that the sheep bones, carefully piled, indicated a wish for children, too, since bones were used as toys by Turkmen children. A hairpin meant that a girl was desired, as did patches of colored cloth; a toy car indicated a wish for a boy.



An Ashgabat monument to "Ruhnama,"

"In Islam, you don't usually appeal to a dead woman," Gulnara said. "You're supposed to ask Allah. But this is a powerful woman."



rrago of memoir, Turkmen lore, and wild promises written by Niyazov as a guide for his people. Photograph by Olivier Jobard.

SIPA

I pointed out that most of the appeals were for boys.

She said, "Women who give birth to girls have another way of indicating that they want a boy. They will name the daughter Enough (Besteir) or Fed Up (Boyduk). These are common names. I know many."

About forty feet from the ruined mosque was another mound, on which there were hundreds of toy huts made of broken clay tiles. It looked like a miniature city. A squatting man in a smock and a woman with a blowing head scarf were building one as we watched.

"People praying for houses," Gulnara said.

The cruelty of Turkmenbashi's policies was obvious when you contemplated the tableau of toy huts, a visible plea for housing. Homeless people abounded in this fabulously wealthy country. (Natural-gas exports alone accounted for an estimated three billion dollars in revenue in 2006. This month, Berdimuhammedov signed a lucrative deal to run a new pipeline to Russia.) Bashi fancied himself a city planner; he'd ordered that hundreds of houses be bulldozed, compounds flattened, and the neighborhoods of Ashgabat dispersed, so that he could build oversized white marble apartment blocks that now stood empty because they were, in their deluxe absurdity, unaffordable. He rarely compensated the owners of the houses he tore down; nor did he rehouse them. They now lived precariously, in temporary huts on the outskirts of town.

Turkmenbashi was also a self-declared landscape artist. He promised to create a desert forest that would improve the climate and last for a millennium. He ordered the planting of tens of thousands of young trees in immensely long rows at the center of Ashgabat and on great swaths of land outside the city, a sort of instant forest. But although Bashi's trees, mostly a type of juniper, were two or three feet high when planted, the forestation was not a success. Drip irrigation had been rigged for them, but they were baked by the sun and blown flat by the wind; a full third had that peculiar rust-red hue, the vivid color of an evergreen's death.

"They are called *arça*," my new guide, whom I'll call Merdan, said. (Mamed was busy that day, or perhaps wary of all my questions.) "He, um, likes them."

I was still waiting for someone to speak Turkmenbashi's name; I wanted to hear what citizens would call him. "Turkmenbashi" seemed too pompous, "Niyazov" too familiar, "the Leader" too formal, and "the national prophet" obviously hard to say with a straight face. Later, I learned that people usually referred to him as *mähriban ata*, "the dear father," or *serdar*, "tribal leader."

We were heading west, out of the city, past scores of signs reading "PEOPLE-MOTHERLAND-TURKMENBASHI." On the side of a mountain, in large letters carved from marble blocks, was a sign in Turkmen that said "OUR HEALTH ROAD OF OUR GREAT ETERNAL LEADER." (It was just the sort of cliff-top message that I had seen a decade earlier in Albania, and doubtless it would end up the same way, as a pile of rubble in the adjacent valley.) This one was meant to encourage people to walk on a paved path that wound through the dying dwarf forest.

"He wants us to be healthy," Merdan said.

But it was questionable whether Turkmenbashi did, in fact, want his people to be healthy. He had closed all hospitals outside Ashgabat, replaced thousands of health-care workers with military conscripts, and instructed the country's doctors to pledge their allegiance to him and to "Ruhnama," rather than taking the Hippocratic oath. Life expectancy had fallen to sixty-three, more than fifteen years below the European average, and, even though Turkmenbashi had banned the diagnosis of several communicable diseases, there had been unofficial reports of the plague in recent years.

Still, Turkmen were expected to do as they were told: never mind that you were a nomad or a villager or a cotton picker, that you spent all day on your feet; you were supposed to make the time to walk on the Eternal Leader's thirty-six kilometres of paved pathway traversing the mountainside. One of Bashi's many residences, another marble palace, lay beyond that hillside. He claimed that the lavish gold-domed Presidential palace built for him in Ashgabat was not of his choosing. ("All I wanted was a small, cozy house.")

"And many people don't have jobs," Merdan said. "More than sixty per cent of the population is unemployed."

"I'm surprised people aren't angry."

"Some are angry. But we have cheap things, too. Natural gas is free. Electricity is free." Gasoline, Merdan told me, cost the equivalent of three cents a gallon; he could fill the tank of his car for fifty cents.

"What do you think are the problems here?" I asked.

"We have problems, but we can't address problems, because there are no problems," Merdan said, and smiled at me, a smile that said, *Please, no more questions.*

Another day, Merdan and I went to the big bazaar outside Ashgabat, which had two names: Tolkuchka, derived from the Russian word for "pushing"; and Jygyldyk, an onomatopoeic word in Turkmen that means "babbling" or "jabbering."

Turkmen have a horror of the evil eye. Perhaps a lingering feature of the shamanism that was once part of the spiritual life of the region, this anxious reflex is apparent in every sphere of Turkmen existence. Trinkets for warding off the evil eye were on sale in many of the stalls in the bazaar—staring glass eyes, carved wooden talismans, and a sheep-horn symbol that Merdan said was effective against maledictions. Some Turkmen believed that evil could come as a withering blast from thin air, a kind of diabolical death ray. The most common antidote to this bedevilment was a charm that broke the ray into pieces, a sort of prism made of colored wool, which one wore as a necklace or a bracelet, or hung over a bed or a doorway. Some of them looked like the kind of multicolored lanyards I had made at camp when I was a boy. Still, the things worked, or so I was assured by Merdan, who bought me a length of brown-and-red rope to get me through to Uzbekistan. (Bashi was as superstitious as his countrymen; he kept an evil-eye amulet over the door to his office, and always wore an evil-eye tie tack, first a blue eye and, in his last months, a diamond.)

In most respects, the Tolkuchka Bazaar was more vital and more various than its obvious rivals, the Covered Market in Istanbul or the bazaar in Damascus or the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota. It was a partly tented affair, with billowing marquees and draperies marking off the separate stalls. It was highly competitive and intensely local; there was not another tourist to be seen. It covered many acres; the horse market alone occupied what could have been an entire fairground. Buying a carpet or a melon or a sack of spices is only part of the interest of such a bazaar. The interaction of people—farmers with their families, gawky boys, shy girls—is also important. Country people may travel for a day or two on an old bus or a night train to meet city people; families rendezvous nearby for picnics; men swagger and shout while boys gape and imitate them. This bazaar was a kind of vortex, drawing in Turkmen from all over, in an ancient ceremony of encounter and negotiation, with music playing and camels howling and hawkers shouting for customers. Everything imaginable was on sale: not just Chinese clothes, shoes, belts, and bluejeans but rows and rows of traditional velveteen dresses, and the detachable white hand-embroidered collars, yoke-shaped and lovely, that are unique to the Turkmen women. Brassware, samovars, silver spoons and dishes—tables and tables of these. Russian belt buckles, military buttons, medals, and campaign ribbons. Bronze artifacts, pottery from diggings, some that looked genuine, others that didn't. Stacks of coins, too, some of them rubles from the departed regime, and lots that the sellers swore were ancient coins from the ruined cities in the desert, from the Turkmen of Afghanistan and India.

Something else attracted me at the Tolkuchka Bazaar: its multiethnic shoppers and stallholders. Most of the people were obviously Turkmen, but there were Russians, Persians, Azeris, and Uzbeks, too. For centuries, settlements across Central Asia were polyglot, and most people thought of themselves as Muslims or as tribesmen, and little else. In the nineteen-twenties, the Soviets carved the region into distinct republics, each named after a national group, but many communities remained mixed, and became more so over time. Some migrations were economic. Others, especially under Stalin, were forced, and left a number of ethnic communities stranded from their homes.

The most exotic group at the bazaar, and in Turkmenistan, was the Koreans. There were several tables of Korean women, smiling and shouting for attention, trays piled with pickled cabbage.

"Stalin sent you?" I asked one.

"He sent my father and mother," she said.

"Kimchi," I said, the only Korean word I knew.

"Yes, yes! Try some!"

"It's cheap. It's the best. Buy some."

"Take me to America!"

"We'll start out by speaking in simple declarative sentences."

One afternoon in Ashgabat, I caused a diplomatic incident. I had been invited by the United States Embassy to give a harmless pep talk to some writers and journalists. About thirty men and women showed up at a sort of boardroom in a hotel that the Embassy used as an annex. They were of every physical type: stylish women in velvet dresses with the impassive faces of nomads, dark beaky men in heavy coats, young mustached men in suits, Russian aunts in blue dresses, carrying satchels, some hefty warrior types braced behind the chairs, their arms folded, a furtive man fussing with a big shoulder bag, and two pale young women, slender Slavic beauties with lank blond hair and blue eyes, standing shyly by the wall.

My topic was "the return journey," how the passage of time reveals the truth of people and places. I spoke for about twenty minutes, through an interpreter. At the end, there was polite applause. The man who had been fussing with his shoulder bag had taken out an expensive camera and begun snapping pictures.

"Any questions?"

Hands shot up.

"What do you think of Islam?" one man asked.

I made a tactful reply, commending the verses of the Koran encouraging hospitality, which I, as a traveller among Muslims, appreciated, and quickly moved to the next question.

"I am a poet," one of the Russian aunties declared. And she went on to ask how she might get her poems translated into English and published in the United States. I referred her to the fellow who had translated her question.

"How do you write a novel?" a young man asked.

I mentioned needing an idea, and characters, and a setting, and about two years of solitude.

"You are not here for very long," another man said. "How can you understand us in such a short time?"

"You're right," I said. "It's impossible. So what particular thing do you think it's important for me to understand about Turkmenistan?"

"Do you know about the pensions?"

"No, I don't. Tell me."

"The government has reduced the state pensions for some people," he said, his voice rising. "In some cases, these were people who were granted pensions by the Soviet government, but when Turkmenistan became independent these were eliminated. What do you think of that?"

As he spoke, the man with the camera leaned over and began snapping his picture.

He turned and took my picture as I said, "We have a similar problem in the United States. A lot of older people will have to work longer because the government pension fund is running out of money. The qualifying age for

Social Security has risen to sixty-seven."

"But what about us?" he asked. Now his voice was strident. "This situation is serious."

"You're not getting your pension?"

"Many thousands of people are not getting it! They were workers. Now they're old, and they have nothing to live on. This is a wealthy country, but they are poor. The government has done this to us. Why don't you write about that?"

"You're a writer, all of you are writers," I said. "You are the people who should write about it, not me. You have all the facts."

"I am not a writer," the man said. "I am the chairman of the Unity and Neutrality Party of Turkmenistan."

Before this could be translated, the photographer leaped forward and snapped pictures from several angles, his shoulder bag bumping against his hip.

Then an American security officer took three strides toward the photographer, grasped his coat in one hand, snatched the camera with the other, and frog-marched the man to the back of the room and outside. This all happened so fast that the photographer did not have time to protest, though I heard him howl as the door slammed.

"Do you write about love?" one of the pretty women asked.

"Constantly," I said. I elaborated on this subject, and then declared the meeting over. The room emptied quickly.

But the harm was done. I had allowed a political dissident a forum. It turned out that this was the first anyone had heard of his underground party. And there might be collateral damage, so to speak, because the other writers and journalists who had been quietly invited (many of them unpopular with the government) had all been photographed.

"What just happened?" I asked the security officer.

I had been impressed by his deftness: without hesitating, almost without creating a scene, he had plucked the man and his camera from the room. The photographer had been a government spy, he said. In the corridor, he had erased the images from the camera.

"He should know better," the American said. "This is technically U.S. government property. Can't take pictures here."

"Is this going to be a problem?"

"We'll see," he said. "Hey, I liked your talk."

The problem developed later that day when the spy complained to his superiors at Turkmenistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And the next day the Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat was summoned to a meeting with the minister. Who is this Paul Theroux? she was asked. What are the details of his visa? Does he have permission to speak? When is he leaving? How?

I had the answers to some of these questions. My visa was in order, and in a few days I planned to take the train to the eastern city of Mary, to see the ruins at Merv. Then the train to Turkmenabat and the Uzbekistan border and, I hoped, another train.

I spent the rest of my time in Ashgabat doing what Turkmen like doing most: sitting on a lovely carpet, eating my way down a spit of lamb kebab or through a mound of rice *plov*. Always there was hard bread, sometimes dumplings; usually there was tea, sometimes wine. Now and then, these meals were served in homes that stood in empty fields, like a stage set for a Beckett play—a house in a wasteland, everything around it bulldozed to make room for a prestige project or a gold statue.

Because I was now being watched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I had to be careful. But having Turkmenbashi as an enemy was also helpful, because when Western diplomats tried to explain my predicament to me they were often revealing about his quirks.

"He hates people meddling," one diplomat told me. "He hates N.G.O.s"—non-governmental humanitarian organizations. Turkmenbashi had banned local human-rights groups and religious groups and environmental groups—all the more readily if they received assistance from foreign partners. He'd placed

MIDTOWN META-MOMENT
You know, I've got an M.B.A. from Harvard! I'm just selling these as a hoot!
Well, ha-ha-HA, because I'm only eating this IRONICALLY!
AL'S HOT DOGS

tight restrictions on the Peace Corps, and he refused to ask for help from the International Monetary Fund or from the World Bank, no doubt fearing that if he opened Turkmenistan's finances to international scrutiny he would be sharing information about his personal finances as well. "That's his big secret," another diplomat told me. "He's a billionaire many times over."

A person who had spent some time with Turkmenbashi in his palace said, "He's a tease. He's a mocker. He banters with his ministers and humiliates them."

"Of course his system's corrupt," a student explained. "You need to bribe a lot of people to get into college, but only Turkmen are allowed. A Russian or an Uzbek or a Korean wouldn't have a chance. They have no future here."

"He stopped education at the ninth grade for most people," a bureaucrat told me. "He was once asked about that by a foreign head of state. He said, 'Uneducated people are easier to govern.' " (One of Berdimuhammedov's first acts after coming to power was to extend school by a year.)

A former exchange student to the U.S. told me something else that Turkmenbashi wouldn't have wanted me to hear: that because Turkmenistan was so close to the heroin-producing areas of Afghanistan hard drugs were a serious problem in the country. Heroin addicts were numerous, and their need for money caused crime. Turkmenistan was also a transshipment route of drugs from Afghanistan to Russia. Afghan hashish was freely available.

Early one evening, I took the overnight train from Ashgabat to Mary. When I found that the sleeper ticket cost the equivalent of four dollars, I became anxious: this was the price of half a dozen melons at the bazaar, and a ticket so cheap boded ill for a long journey. I guessed that the train would be dirty and crowded, a mass of people travelling in the light of a few twenty-five-watt bulbs, and it gave me no satisfaction to be right.

The railway station itself was lovely, a classic Soviet building from the nineteen-fifties, very clean and patrolled by soldiers with machine guns. Yet no passenger was searched, and whereas travellers on Turkmenistan roads were subject to roadblocks and the arbitrary search-and-seizure rules of the security forces, train travellers, it seemed, were beneath notice.

I sat in my four-berth compartment with a soldier in a dark uniform, a student of about twenty-two, and an old man with a long chin beard, wearing traditional Turkmen dress—a cylindrical black lambskin hat and a long brown cloak over a smock, one of those national costumes which seem eternal and comfortable everywhere, in all seasons. He saw me and began to address me, using the student as a translator.

"*Salaam. Dhayf al-Rahman*," he said.

"Welcome. You are a guest of Allah, the Merciful One," the student translated.

"Please thank him for me."

The man spoke again.

"He has a question for you," the student said. "Will you answer?"

I heard the whistle blow. The train slowly pulled out of Ashgabat Station, and within minutes we were in the desert. The old man was delivering a monologue.

"He says that some years ago an astronaut went to the moon," the student said. "He was from America. When he got to the moon, he heard a strange noise. It was an *azan*"—the call to prayer, usually issued by a muezzin chanting from a mosque. "The astronaut recorded it. When he came back to earth, the scientists in America analyzed it, and they came to think that it was the voice of the Prophet Muhammad."

"On the moon?"

"Yes. On the moon."

"Furthermore, he says that because of this the astronaut became a Muslim and began praying five times a day."

The old man was facing me, as though defying me to deny the story.

"I haven't heard this story."

"He says he believes it."

"What does he think about it?"

When this question was translated, the student said, "For him, it's good news."

It seemed to me like a Turkmen version of a Pat Robertson story: divine intervention in an unlikely place, resulting in a beatific conversion, the sun breaking through the clouds. Instead of Jesus speaking to a searcher, it was Muhammad, but it came to the same thing. Later, an Arabic scholar told me that a persistent urban myth in the Middle East is that Neil Armstrong—sometimes confused with Louis Armstrong—converted to Islam.

The best tactic on this overnight train journey, it seemed to me, was to get along, which meant staying off the subject of religion. As I was thinking this, the old man was still talking to the student.

"He asks if you believe in God."

"I have a lot of questions on this subject," I said.

"He asks, 'But do you believe in life after death?' "

"I don't know about this. No one has ever come back from the dead to tell us anything, so how can we know?"

"The holy Koran tells us."

The old man spoke directly to me in Turkmen and became very animated.

"He says, 'The grass grows. Then the grass turns brown. Then the grass dies. Then it grows again. It turns green and gets tall.' "

The old man was still staring, one skinny gnarled hand in his lap, the other gripping the long gray beard attached to his chin.

"He says, 'Life is like that.' "

"Tell him I agree. Life is like that, even where I'm from."

"Where are you from?"

"Tell him America."

The old Muslim received this information with more interest than I had expected.

"He asks, 'Do you have cotton in America?' "

"Lots of it."

"He is wondering how many hectares of cotton are growing in America."

"Tell him I'm not sure. Why is he interested?"

The man showed me his ruined hands, his twisted fingers.

"He picks cotton in the fields near Yoloten, south on the road to Afghanistan, where there are cotton farms."

The old man's name was Selim. He had been born near Mary. He had not gone to school. As a boy, he had worked in the fields; he had picked cotton his whole life. He had married a woman from his clan and had four children.

He challenged me to guess his age. He looked about seventy, so I guessed sixty. He laughed and said that he was fifty.

At my farewell party in Ashgabat, I had been given a bag of food for the train—spinach pies, mushroom foldovers, sticky buns, all wrapped in paper. In the dim light of the compartment, I unwrapped it and handed it around—to Selim, the student, the young soldier, and a hanger-on gaping at the doorway. Selim asked a question.

"He says, 'Ask the American if we can say a prayer.' "

"Of course," I said.

All Muslims wash before they pray. When water is unavailable, they use sand or dust to perform the dry ablution called *tayammum*, making an elaborate business of rubbing the hands and arms, and slowly wiping the face, massaging the eyes, the cheeks, the jaw, then drawing the hands downward. Selim went through this ritual as the train rushed across the desert, rattling the windows and the door handles.

Then he prayed, for almost a full minute, his eyes closed, speaking into the stifling air of the compartment. When he was finished, I asked him what he had said. Was it a standard prayer or had he improvised it?

He said that it was improvised for the occasion. "I thanked Allah for the food. I thanked the friend who gave it to us. I wished the friend blessings on his journey."

"*Sagbol*," I said, and, in thanking him, exhausted my knowledge of Turkmen.

" 'Do they pray in America at mealtime?' he asks."

"Many people do."

"Do they pray at other times, too?"

"Yes. Americans pray a lot."

A knock at the compartment door: the conductor was handing out sheets. Though it was not late, the light was so bad that there was nothing to do but sleep. We each lay down in a bunk. After the feeble light was switched off, I could see the dark plains passing, the low scrub, the boulders glowing, smooth and bluish in the moonlight.

Hours later, still in the dark, we approached the town of Mary. The others were awake and yawning.

Ashgabat had been hot and dry. Wishing to lighten my bag, I had given my sweater to Mamed and my scarf to Gulnara. Approaching Mary, I gave my heavy long-sleeved polo shirt to the student, who had been so helpful.

"It's a lucky shirt," I said.

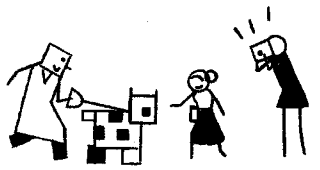
In return, he gave me a multicolored cord to ward off the evil eye.

Selim said, "I will wait at the station until eight o'clock. Then I'll get the bus to Yoloten. It costs five thousand manat. A shared taxi costs ten thousand manat. But I say, better to take the bus and give the extra money to my children."

It was a lesson in rural Turkmen economics and paternal love: this man who'd had a fitful night of sleep on the train would crouch in the cold of Mary Station and wait for three hours wrapped in his cloak to save thirty cents to divide among his four kids.

In ancient times, the area I was now in had been called Khorasan; Merv was its noble capital. In one extravagant conceit, it was "the Soul of Kings." It is almost axiomatic that such a marvel would eventually turn into a dust bowl, and Merv had. But for centuries it had been an imperial metropolis, a center of learning, a place of citadels, a walled city, or several of them. What was left of it lay in the hard glitter of the Asian desert, about an hour up the railway line, near a town and a station called Bairam Ali, which dated from 1887, not long after the Russian empire took control of the region. A substantial villa had been built for the tsar in Bairam Ali, but in the end His Highness hadn't shown up, and the villa was eventually turned into a sanatorium, which it still is now, for people with heart and kidney ailments. Mary—the adjacent city and provincial capital—was half boomtown, half slum: filled with the requisite gold statues and portraits, white marble government buildings, prestige projects (an opera house, luxury hotels, a pointless flyover), and boulevards almost empty of traffic.

Off the big thoroughfares, on backstreets, were low decaying houses and Soviet tenements. Some Russians remained, but not many. The Germans whom Stalin had relocated here from the Volga region during the Second World War had all departed. I stayed in an inexpensive government hotel, where the other guests were all Turkmen officials. Most people came to Mary to see the ruins at Merv, or the ones at Gonur Depe, also nearby. Either that or the cotton fields.



One morning in Mary, I met Evgenia Golubeva. A sturdy woman with two daughters studying in Russia, she was a third-generation Russian in Turkmenistan, well known and loved locally. She had studied the ruins here and in Gonur Depe, and she was both knowledgeable and passionate about these flattened cities.

Ancient Merv, to my fascinated and amateur eye, resembled many fabled desert cities in decline that I'd seen. It looked like a string of sandcastles after the tide had brimmed and washed over them, simplifying and smoothing their walls, until there was only the faintest suggestion of symmetry in their slopes. But, as I kept thinking, this was a vivid metaphor for what inevitably happened to the hubristic world of wealth and power, to the world of gold statues and marble palaces, of vain slogans and planted forests. The world of armies and conquest. The world of generals and windbags. Ha! It all turned to sand and was overrun with rodents and lizards. Hawks flew above it, searching for vermin.

"This is Erk Kala, oldest part of Merv, from sixth century B.C.," Evgenia said, indicating a wide low crater of dried mud.

One of the pearls of the Silk Road, Merv had been overrun by Alexander the Great's men and Tamerlane and the Persians, sacked by Tolui Khan, son of Genghis Khan, in 1221, and later visited by Omar Khayyám. It had been Buddhist and Nestorian Christian; it had been Zoroastrian, mentioned in the Avesta as a place of strength and holiness, one of the "good lands." Importantly, Merv had been targeted by Muhammad as a staging post for Islamic conversion. The Prophet himself had sent two of his closest disciples here to evangelize, Evgenia told me. She said that he called them "my eyes in the East." They were buried here, their graves marked by a marble slab with a long inscription, which she translated:

“Oh, traveller, you visit this place and you are lucky, because the people who are buried here are holy and close to God. If you have a problem, walk three times around the tomb and it will be solved.”

My problem, so I had been told, was that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was annoyed with me, thanks to the disturbance at my talk. “You might have a problem at the border,” I was told. “They might hassle you. They could seriously hold you up.”

So I walked three times around the tomb.

What I liked about Merv was its innocence—there were no fences, no postcards for sale, no pests, not even much respect. In this shattered and somewhat forgotten place, some visitors scrambled up and down the steep walls, kicking them apart, picking up pieces of broken pottery; others picnicked among the crenellations. Young boys genially pissed on the ruins.

In the distance, some men were grazing a herd of camels. Three boys on donkeys approached us, yelling and galloping across an ancient wall, leaving hoofprints. They had no saddles; they held on to rope bridles and kicked their skinny gray mounts.

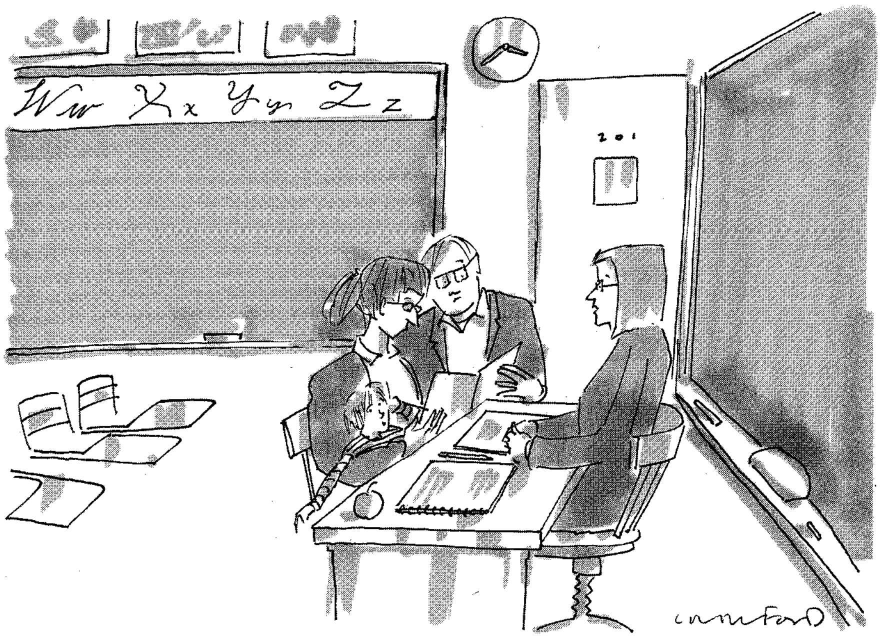
“They are Beluchis, from Persia,” Evgenia said. “They settled here many years ago.”

She told me that the local people, superstitious about the aura of slaughter and conquest at Merv, tended to avoid it; they used it only to pasture their animals or to pilfer bricks. Goatherds huddled by the remaining part of the exposed wall of the complex known as Gyaur Kala. The sun was setting. The shepherds’ fire scorched the ancient bricks as they cooked their evening meal.

In Mary, I was told that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was still watching me, and that this might be a good time to head east to the Uzbek border. Someone would be sent to help me. And one morning this man showed up at my hotel. I shall call him Berdy. He said that he had been deputized to accompany me to the border. He had been an exchange student in the United States.

“What did you like about the States?”

“Good people. Clean conditions. No bribes.”



“I’m holding George back this year because he’s failed to forge a personal style.”

• •

“Tell me what you didn’t like.”

“The way that children treat their elders. Not good.”

What had surprised him especially was the casual way that teen-agers spoke to their parents: offhand, disrespectful, sarcastic.

“My host family was very nice to me, but one day coming home from school the daughter was smoking a cigarette. I said that her mother wouldn’t like it. She said, ‘My mother’s stupid. Don’t pay any attention to her.’ Imagine that. I was shocked. A mother is holy!”

We drove through the prairie toward Turkmenabat, another renamed city—some people I met in Mary still called it Çarjou. In Ashgabat, I had asked an American Peace Corps volunteer what this part of the country would look like. He said, “Looks like west Texas,” and it did.

An old shrouded woman squatted by the road, with a pile of trinkets—here in the middle of nowhere, yet another seller of amulets against the evil eye. Berdy bought me another multicolored demon-distracting cord, thinking it might come in handy.

Perhaps it did. Our driver dumped us in Turkmenabat, saying he could not go farther. We got another car, but no sooner had the old man driving it pointed out the Amu Darya River—one of the wonders of this region—than a roadblock appeared. The soldiers looked at Berdy’s papers and told him that he could go no farther.

He wished me luck. I watched him through the rear window, standing in the empty road.

We came to Farap, the Turkmenistan border. I was fearful of the border formalities, but there was no problem. I was searched, my bag examined, my icon remarked upon. My passport, too.

“You live Gavaii.”

“Yes.”

“Gonolulu?”

“That’s right.”

“You stay Ashgabat?”

“Yes.”

“You see beeg beelding?”

“Yes.”

“Weech you like better?”

“My favorite,” I said with absurd eagerness, “was the big statue of Turkmenbashi on the marble pillar. His arm is up”—I raised my arm up in a kind of Nazi salute—“and when the sun moves, the gold statue moves, like this. Beautiful. Gold!”

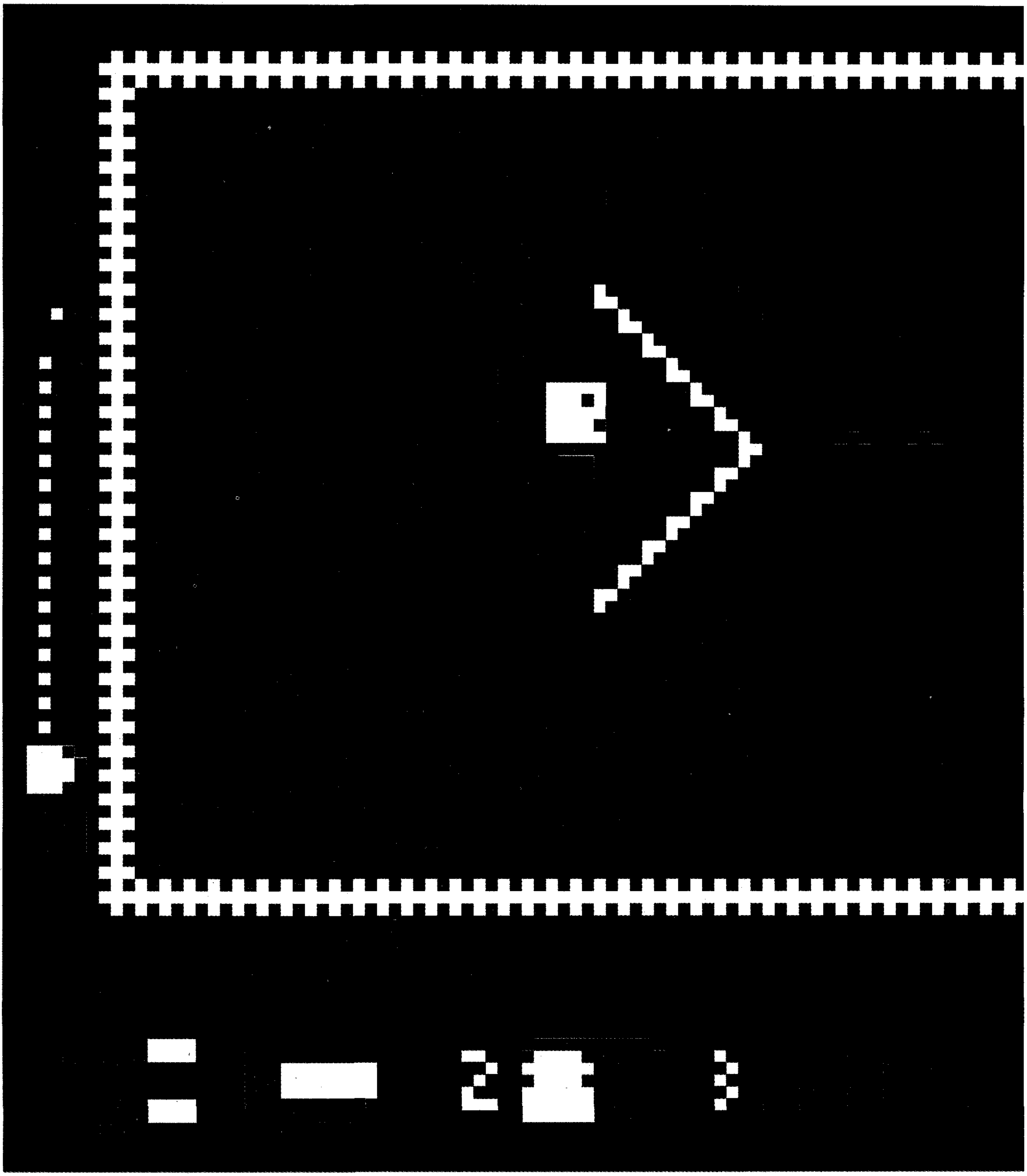
“Yes,” the man said, smiling in satisfaction. He waved me through. “You can pass. *Nyet problyema.*”

So I walked past the barbed-wire fence on the dirt road through the desert toward Uzbekistan. ♦

FICTION

PUPPY

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS



Twice already Marie had pointed out the brilliance of the autumnal sun on the perfect field of corn, because the brilliance of the autumnal sun on the perfect field of corn put her in mind of a haunted house—not a haunted house she had ever actually seen but the mythical one that sometimes appeared in her mind (with adjacent graveyard and cat on a fence) whenever she saw the brilliance of the autumnal sun on the perfect etc. etc., and she wanted to make sure that, if the kids had a corresponding mythical haunted house that appeared in their minds whenever they saw the brilliance of the etc. etc., it would come up now, so that they could all experience it together, like friends, like college friends on a road trip, sans pot, ha ha ha!

But no. When she, a third time, said, "Wow, guys, check that out," Abbie said, "O.K., Mom, we get it, it's corn," and Josh said, "Not now, Mom, I'm Leavening my Loaves," which was fine with her; she had no problem with that, Noble Baker being preferable to Bra Stuffer, the game he'd asked for.

Well, who could say? Maybe they didn't even have any mythical vignettes in their heads. Or maybe the mythical vignettes they had in their heads were totally different from the ones she had in her head. Which was the beauty of it, because, after all, they were their own little people! You were just a caretaker. They didn't have to feel what *you* felt; they just had to be supported in feeling what *they* felt.

Still, wow, that cornfield was such a classic.

"Whenever I see a field like that, guys?" she said. "I somehow think of a haunted house!"

"Slicing Knife! Slicing Knife!" Josh shouted. "You nimrod machine! I chose that!"

Speaking of Halloween, she remembered last year, when their cornstalk column had tipped their shopping cart over. Gosh, how they'd laughed at that! Oh, family laughter was golden; she'd had none of that in her childhood, Dad being so dour and Mom so ashamed. If Mom and Dad's cart had tipped, Dad would have given the cart a despairing kick and Mom would have stridden purposefully away to reapply her lipstick, distancing herself from Dad, while she, Marie, would have nervously taken that horrid plastic Army man she'd named Brady into her mouth.

TIBOR KÁRPÁTI

Well, in this family laughter was encouraged! Last night, when Josh had goosed her with his GameBoy, she'd shot a spray of toothpaste across the mirror and they'd all cracked up, rolling around on the floor with Goochie, and Josh had said, such nostalgia in his voice, "Mom, remember when Goochie was a puppy?" Which was when Abbie had burst into tears, because, being only five, she had no memory of Goochie as a puppy.

Hence this Family Mission. And as far as Robert? Oh, God bless Robert! There was a man. He would have no problem whatsoever with this Family Mission. She loved the way he had of saying "Ho HO!" whenever she brought home something new and unexpected.

"Ho HO!" Robert had said, coming home to find the iguana. "Ho HO!" he had said, coming home to find the ferret trying to get into the iguana cage. "We appear to be the happy operators of a menagerie!"

She loved him for his playfulness—you could bring home a hippo you'd put on a credit card (both the ferret and the iguana had gone on credit cards) and he'd just say "Ho HO!" and ask what the creature ate and what hours it slept and what the heck they were going to name the little bugger.

In the back seat, Josh made the *git-git-git* sound he always made when his Baker was in Baking Mode, trying to get his Loaves into the oven while fighting off various Hungry Denizens, such as a Fox with a distended stomach; such as a fey Robin that would improbably carry the Loaf away, speared on its beak, whenever it had succeeded in dropping a Clonking Rock on your Baker—all of which Marie had learned over the summer by studying the Noble Baker manual while Josh was asleep.

And it had helped, it really had. Josh was less withdrawn lately, and when she came up behind him now while he was playing and said, like, "Wow, honey, I didn't know you could do Pumpernickel," or "Sweetie, try Serrated Blade, it cuts quicker. Try it while doing Latch the Window," he would reach back with his non-controlling hand and swat at her affectionately, and yesterday they'd shared a good laugh when he'd accidentally knocked off her glasses.

So her mother could go right ahead and claim that she was spoiling the kids. These were not spoiled kids. These were *well-loved* kids. At least she'd never left one of them standing in a blizzard for two hours after a junior-high dance. At least she'd never drunkenly snapped at one of them, "I hardly consider you college material." At least she'd never locked one of them in a closet (a closet!) while entertaining a literal ditchdigger in the parlor.

Oh, God, what a beautiful world! The autumn colors, that glinting river, that lead-colored cloud pointing down like a rounded arrow at that half-remodelled McDonald's standing above I-90 like a castle.

This time would be different, she was sure of it. The kids would care for this pet themselves, since a puppy wasn't scaly and didn't bite. ("Ho HO!" Robert had said the first time the iguana bit him. "I see you have an opinion on the matter!")

Thank you, Lord, she thought, as the Lexus flew through the cornfield. You have given me so much: struggles and the strength to overcome them; grace, and new chances every day to spread that grace around. And in her mind she sang out, as she sometimes did when feeling that the world was good and she had at last found her place in it, "Ho HO, ho HO!"

Callie pulled back the blind.

Yes. Awesome. It was still solved so *perfect*.

There was plenty for him to do back there. A yard could be a whole world, like her yard when she was a kid had been a whole world. From the three holes in her wood fence she'd been able to see Exxon (Hole One) and Accident Corner (Hole Two), and Hole Three was actually two holes that if you lined them up right your eyes would do this weird crossing thing and you could play Oh My God I Am So High by staggering away with your eyes crossed, going "Peace, man, peace."

When Bo got older, it would be different. Then he'd need his freedom. But now he just needed not to get killed. Once they found him way over on Testament. And that was across I-90. How had he crossed I-90? She knew how. Darted. That's how he crossed streets. Once a total stranger called them from Hightown Plaza. Even Dr. Brile had said it: "Callie, this boy is going to end up

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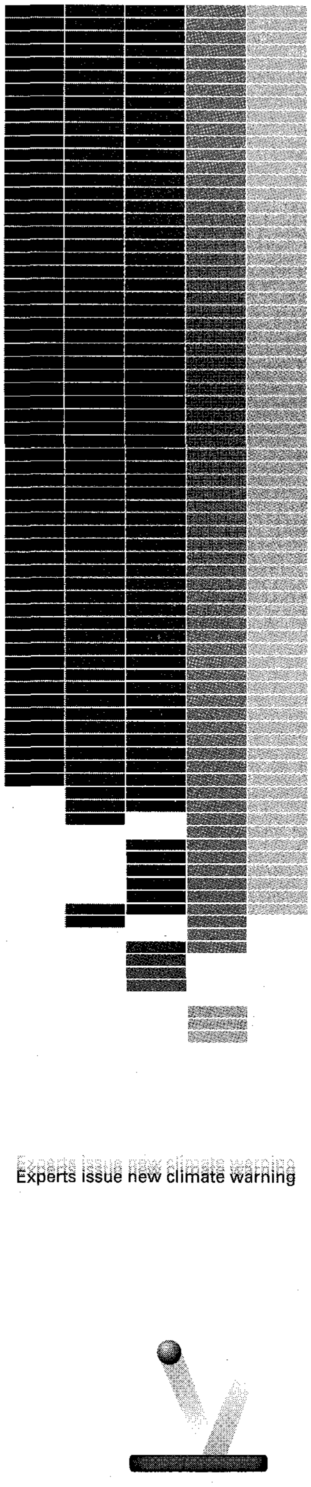
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dead if you don't get this under control. Is he taking the medication?"

Well, sometimes he was and sometimes he wasn't. The meds made him grind his teeth and his fist would suddenly pound down. He'd broken plates that way, and once a glass tabletop and got four stitches in his wrist.

Today he didn't need the medication because he was safe in the yard, because she'd fixed it so *perfect.*

He was out there practicing pitching by filling his Yankees helmet with pebbles and winging them at the tree.

He looked up and saw her and did the thing where he blew a kiss.

Sweet little man.

Now all she had to worry about was the pup. She hoped the lady who'd called would actually show up. It was a nice pup. White, with brown around one eye. Cute. If the lady showed up, she'd definitely want it. And if she took it Jimmy was off the hook. He'd hated doing it that time with the kittens. But if no one took the pup he'd do it. He'd have to. Because his feeling was, when you said you were going to do a thing and didn't do it, that was how kids got into drugs. Plus, he'd been raised on a farm, or near a farm anyways, and anybody raised on a farm knew that you had to do what you had to do in terms of sick animals or extra animals—the pup being not sick, just extra.

That time with the kittens, Jessi and Mollie had called him a murderer, getting Bo all worked up, and Jimmy had yelled, "Look, you kids, I was raised on a farm and you got to do what you got to do!" Then he'd cried in bed, saying how the kittens had mewed in the bag all the way to the pond, and how he wished he'd never been raised on a farm, and she'd almost said, "You mean near a farm" (his dad had run a car wash outside Cortland), but sometimes when she got too smart-assed he would do this hard pinching thing on her arm while waltzing her around the bedroom, as if the place where he was pinching were like her handle, going, "I'm not sure I totally heard what you just said to me."

So, that time after the kittens, she'd only said, "Oh, honey, you did what you had to do."

And he'd said, "I guess I did, but it's sure not easy raising kids the right way."

And then, because she hadn't made his life harder by being a smart-ass, they had lain there making plans, like why not sell this place and move to Arizona and buy a car wash, why not buy the kids "Hooked on Phonics," why not plant tomatoes, and then they'd got to wrestling around and (she had no idea why she remembered this) he had done this thing of, while holding her close, bursting this sudden laugh/despair snort into her hair, like a sneeze, or like he was about to start crying.

Which had made her feel special, him trusting her with that.

So what she would love, for tonight? Was getting the pup sold, putting the kids to bed early, and then, Jimmy seeing her as all organized in terms of the pup, they could mess around and afterward lie there making plans, and he could do that laugh/snort thing in her hair again.

Why that laugh/snort meant so much to her she had no freaking idea. It was just one of the weird things about the Wonder That Was Her, ha ha ha.

Outside, Bo hopped to his feet, suddenly curious, because (here we go) the lady who'd called had just pulled up?

Yep, and in a nice car, too, which meant too bad she'd put "Cheap" in the ad.

Abbie squealed, "I love it, Mommy, I want it!," as the puppy looked up dimly from its shoebox and the lady of the house went trudging away and one-two-three-four plucked up four *dog turds* from the rug.

Well, wow, what a super field trip for the kids, Marie thought, ha ha (the filth, the mildew smell, the dry aquarium holding the single encyclopedia volume, the pasta pot on the bookshelf with an inflatable candy cane inexplicably sticking out of it), and although some might have been disgusted (by the spare tire *on the dining-room table*, by the way the glum mother dog, the presumed in-house pooper, was dragging its rear over the pile of clothing in the corner, in a sitting position, splay-legged, a moronic look of pleasure on her face), Marie realized (resisting the urge to rush to the sink and wash her hands, in part because the sink had *a basketball in it*) that what this really was was deeply sad.

Please do not touch anything, please do not touch, she said to Josh and Abbie, but just in her head, wanting to give the children a chance to observe her being democratic and accepting, and afterward they could all wash up at the half-remodelled McDonald's, as long as they just please please kept their hands out of their mouths, and God forbid they should rub their eyes.

The phone rang, and the lady of the house plodded into the kitchen, placing the daintily held, paper-towel-wrapped turds *on the counter*.

"Mommy, I want it," Abbie said.

"I will definitely walk him like twice a day," Josh said.

"Don't say 'like,'" Marie said.

"I will definitely walk him twice a day," Josh said.

O.K., then, all right, they would adopt a white-trash dog. Ha ha. They could name it Zeke, buy it a little corncob pipe and a straw hat. She imagined the puppy, having crapped on the rug, looking up at her, going, *Cain't hep it.* But no. Had she come from a perfect place? Everything was transmutable. She imagined the puppy grown up, entertaining some friends, speaking to them in a British accent: *My family of origin was, um, rather not, shall we say, of the most respectable . . .*

Ha ha, wow, the mind was amazing, always cranking out these—

Marie stepped to the window and, anthropologically pulling the blind aside, was shocked, so shocked that she dropped the blind and shook her head, as if trying to wake herself, shocked to see a young boy, just a few years younger than Josh, harnessed and chained to a tree, via some sort of doohickey by which—she pulled the blind back again, sure she could not have seen what she thought she had—

When the boy ran, the chain spooled out. He was running now, looking back at her, showing off. When he reached the end of the chain, it jerked and he dropped as if shot.

He rose to a sitting position, railed against the chain, whipped it back and forth, crawled to a bowl of water, and, lifting it to his lips, took a drink: a drink *from a dog's bowl.*

Josh joined her at the window. She let him look. He should know that the world was not all lessons and iguanas and Nintendo. It was also this muddy simple boy tethered like an animal.

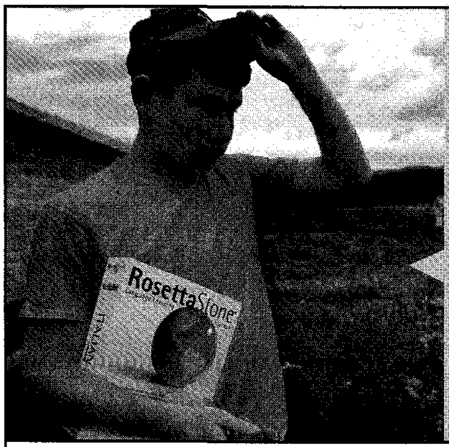
She remembered coming out of the closet to find her mother's scattered lingerie and the ditchdigger's metal hanger full of orange flags. She remembered waiting outside the junior high in the bitter cold, the snow falling harder, as she counted over and over to two hundred, promising herself each time that when she reached two hundred she would begin the long walk back—

God, she would have killed for just one righteous adult to confront her mother, shake her, and say, "You idiot, this is your child, your child you're—"

"So what were you guys thinking of naming him?" the woman said, coming out of the kitchen.

The cruelty and ignorance just radiated from her fat face, with its little smear of lipstick.

"I'm afraid we won't be taking him after all," Marie said coldly.



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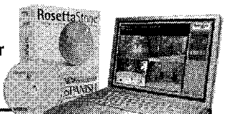

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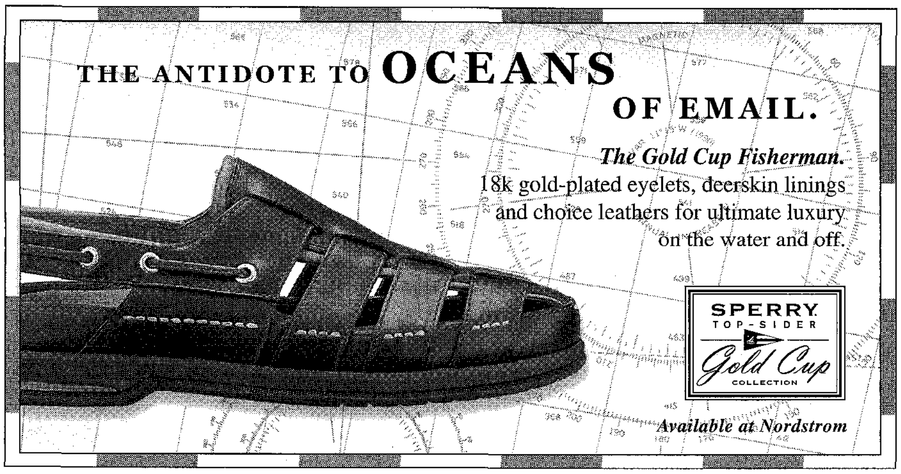
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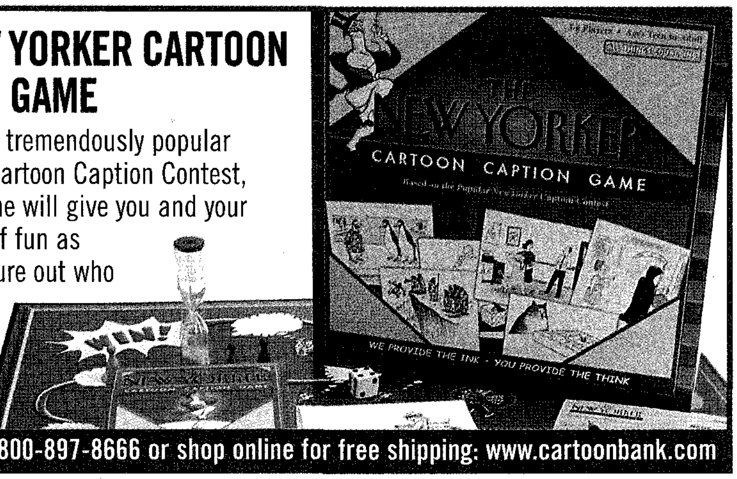
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Such an uproar from Abbie! But Josh—she would have to praise him later, maybe buy him the Italian Loaves Expansion Pak—hissed something to Abbie, and then they were moving out through the trashed kitchen (past some kind of *crankshaft* on a cookie sheet, past a partial red pepper afloat *in a can of green paint*) while the lady of the house scuttled after them, saying, wait, wait, they could have it for free, please take it—she really wanted them to have it.

No, Marie said, it would not be possible for them to take it at this time, her feeling being that one really shouldn't possess something if one wasn't up to properly caring for it.

"Oh," the woman said, slumping in the doorway, the scrambling pup on one shoulder.

Out in the Lexus, Abbie began to cry softly, saying, "Really, that was the perfect pup for me."

And it was a nice pup, but Marie was not going to contribute to a situation like this in even the smallest way.

Simply was not going to do it.

The boy came to the fence. If only she could have said to him, with a single look, *Life will not necessarily always be like this. Your life could suddenly blossom into something wonderful. It can happen. It happened to me.*

But secret looks, looks that conveyed a world of meaning with their subtle blah blah blah—that was all bullshit. What was not bullshit was a call to Child Welfare, where she knew Linda Berling, a very no-nonsense lady who would snatch this poor kid away so fast it would make that fat mother's thick head spin.

Callie shouted, "Bo, back in a sec!," and, swiping the corn out of the way with her non-pup arm, walked until there was nothing but corn and sky.

It was so small it didn't move when she set it down, just sniffed and tumped over.

Well, what did it matter, drowned in a bag or starved in the corn? This way Jimmy wouldn't have to do it. He had enough to worry about. The boy she'd first met with hair to his waist was now this old man shrunk with worry. As far as the money, she had sixty hidden away. She'd give him twenty of that and go, "The people who bought the pup were super-nice."

Don't look back, don't look back, she said in her head as she raced away through the corn.

Then she was walking along Teallback Road like a sportwalker, like some lady who walked every night to get slim, except that she was nowhere near slim, she knew that, and she also knew that when sportwalking you did not wear jeans and unlaced hiking boots. Ha ha! She wasn't stupid. She just made bad choices. She remembered Sister Carol saying, "Callie, you are bright enough but you incline toward that which does not benefit you." *Yep, well, Sister, you got that right*, she said to the nun in her mind. But what the hell. What the heck. When things got easier moneywise, she'd get some decent tennis shoes and start walking and get slim. And start night school. Slimmer. Maybe medical technology. She was never going to be really slim. But Jimmy liked her the way she was, and she liked him the way he was, which maybe that's what love was, liking someone how he was and doing things to help him get even better.

Like right now she was helping Jimmy by making his life easier by killing something so he—no. All she was doing was walking, walking away from—

Pushing the words *killing puppy* out of her head, she put in her head the words *beautiful sunny day wow I'm loving this beautiful sunny day so much*—

What had she just said? That had been good. *Love was liking someone how he was and doing things to help him get better.*

Like Bo wasn't perfect, but she loved him how he was and tried to help him get better. If they could keep him safe, maybe he'd mellow out as he got older. If he mellowed out, maybe he could someday have a family. Like there he was now in the yard, sitting quietly, looking at flowers. Tapping with his bat, happy enough. He looked up, waved the bat at her, gave her that smile. Yesterday he'd been stuck in the house, all miserable. He'd ended the day screaming in bed, so frustrated. Today he was looking at flowers. Who was it that thought up that idea, the idea that had made today better than yesterday? Who loved him enough to think that up? Who loved him more than anyone else in the world loved him?

Her.

She did. ♦

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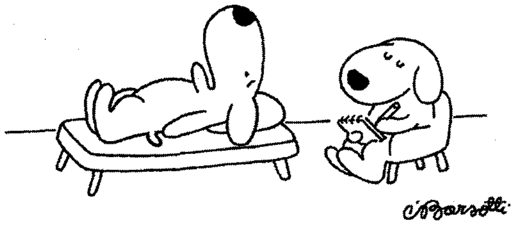

"They moved my bowl."

Charles Barsotti, 1995

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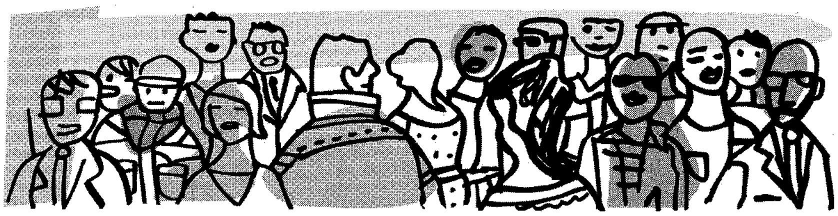

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The diaries of Ronald Reagan.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

While he was President, Ronald Reagan kept an almost daily diary. He was the only President during the last century to do so, and the result—in a form that is greatly reduced but still makes a very long book—"The Reagan Diaries" (HarperCollins; $35), takes its place next to an earlier volume, almost as large, of correspondence written in his own hand, another of speeches, and yet another of his radio talks. Presidents, including Reagan, usually write memoirs of their White House years afterward; Reagan wins the prize for copiousness of in-office Presidential writing.

Some great politicians have an eerie (Clintonian, one might say) talent for leaving admirers with wildly varied impressions of them. Reagan wasn't like that. He presented a consistent persona, to which people's reactions varied wildly. Reagan ran for office as the nominee of a major party four times—twice for governor of California and twice for President—and won all four races by big margins. But people who got close to him were often unable to feel the connection that voters did from a distance. Aide after aide, and Reagan's official biographer, Edmund Morris, have testified to his remoteness and unknowability, and his children seem to have felt the same way. Intellectuals, journalists, and old Washington pros always saw him as a lightweight—Clark Clifford memorably called him "an amiable dunce." He also generated consistent ideological opposition, mainly from the left but also from conservatives who thought he didn't deliver on his assurances that he was one of them.

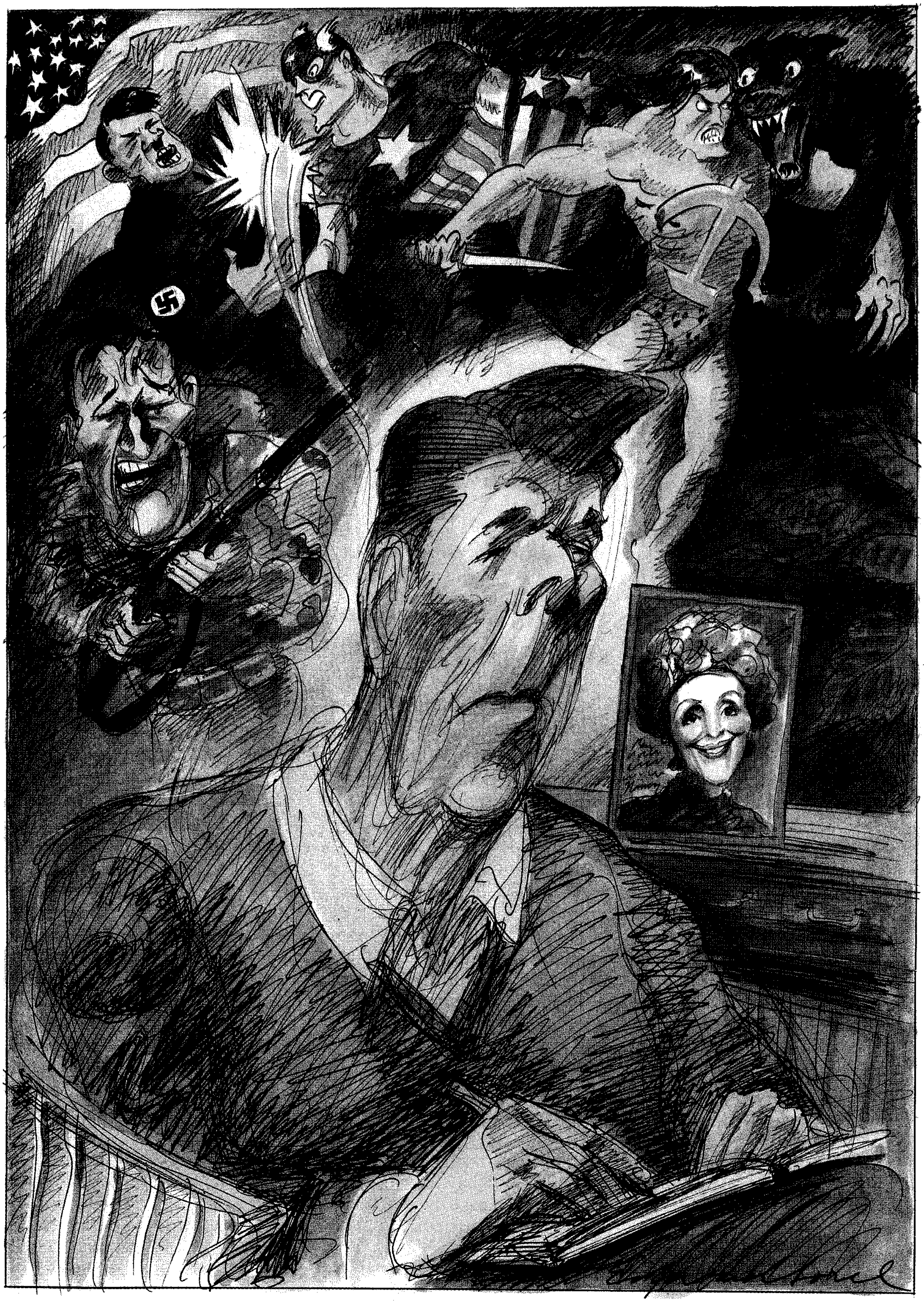
Reagan's diaries will reinforce each of these reactions. Those who adore him will find that he didn't have much of a dark side (though he does once refer to Senator Lowell Weicker, of Connecticut, as "a schmuck"). He doesn't curse and plot against enemies, like the Richard Nixon we know from his Oval Office tapes; he doesn't agonize and fall prey to insecurity, like Lyndon Johnson, whom we also know best from his office tapes. He keeps a couple of key principles—taxation is bad and Communism is evil—clearly in mind at all times and doesn't get mired in details. He maintains regular, though unavoidably somewhat scripted, contact with ordinary Americans, especially courageous hard-luck cases, often people whose stories Reagan saw on television and whom he was moved to invite to the White House. He gets genuinely upset when he encounters profanity in a movie. Although, as his critics have often noted, he was not a regular churchgoer, his faith in God is a consistent element in the diaries and doesn't seem staged. (He also mentions that he believes Armageddon is coming, that the Shroud of Turin was, in fact, the burial cloth of Jesus Christ, and that Abraham Lincoln's ghost inhabits the White House.)

Reagan has a quotidian quality, which will appeal to traditional conservatives who don't like holders of state power to think of it as a great and glorious calling. Day after day, he turns up at the office, works his way through papers and meetings, and longs for the arrival of the weekend. The Presidency in Reagan's hands seems almost boring: a ceaseless round of plane flights, official dinners, greetings proffered to groups of visitors, adjudication of squabbles among aides, and flattering phone calls to wavering members of Congress. As his term wears on and he enters his late seventies, Reagan also devotes a lot of his time to doctors' visits, all of which he duly recorded. He's a trouper, not a maestro energized and exhilarated by power.

Although Douglas Brinkley, the historian who edited the diaries, generously calls Reagan's writing "uncomplicated and humble," the truth is that Reagan was a master of spoken, not written, English. He writes in a simple, singsong prose, with many misspellings. Richard Crossman he's not. Here is an entry from a day six months into the Presidency:

> Saw "Mommie" [Nancy Reagan] off for London & the Royal Wedding. I worry when she's out of sight 6 minutes. How am I going to hold out for 6 days. The lights just don't seem as warm & bright without her.
>
> Went to the Oval office for the morning brief but my mind wasn't on it. Met in the State Dining Room with St. Legislators, Mayors & Co. officials from a dozen states re the tax bill....
>
> Al Haig [then the Secretary of State] called & said we may have a "cease fire" tomorrow between Israel & the P.L.O.
>
> Watched the "Waltons" on T.V. and so to bed.

Johnson, in his taped conversations, occasionally offered astute, well-informed, tactically clever, and even funny assessments of a situation. Nixon, scheming as he was, usually had something perceptive to say about the alignment of political forces around an issue. The Reagan of the diaries is usually no better than dutiful. For someone whose job was to connect with people, he has amazingly little of interest to say about those he encounters. They are resolute (Margaret Thatcher), or dedicated (George Shultz), or intransigent (Menachem Begin), or excessively critical (Tip O'Neill, and almost all journalists). Of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Reagan says, "They are both nice & she is an outstanding human being." Of Mother Teresa, "She's a most remarkable little woman." The same descriptive flatness occurs in Reagan's accounts of great



Reagan's mind was filled with Americana—science-fiction tales, inspirational sermons, motifs from old movies.

events, and in his discussions of politics and policy. The fact that Reagan saw the world in such straightforward terms may have been a political advantage for him, but it is not a literary one.

Reagan does attend closely to his relationship with his audience. He rewrites speeches to make them simpler; he pays attention to what his pollster, Richard Wirthlin, reports; and he almost always takes note of the way his appearances have been received. Wild acclaim in a public setting brings him the most obvious pleasure of any of his Presidential duties. (Old movies, vacations, and horseback riding bring him pleasure, too, but they aren't Presidential duties.) After a speaking engagement at St. John's University in 1985, he writes, "What a morale booster that was—1000's of students telling me they loved me—cheering every other word." He has a curious relation to public criticism. He certainly isn't thick-skinned. It's inevitable that a President who wants to change the direction of American governance would be subject to frequent attacks, but, when the attacks come, Reagan notices them, and they hurt. He doesn't brood, though: there is a flash of righteous indignation and it's over. He seems never to entertain, as most of us do, the thought that a criticism might be indicative of a real fault. Instead, it registers as vicious, unfair, unfounded, and dismissable. Perhaps this is an old actor's trick, developed in response to years of rejection; in a President, it has its uses as a way of keeping oneself in steady forward motion.

Although by the standards of the professional overachievers who populate the Washington establishment Reagan always seemed—and will seem in his diaries—to be lazy and disconnected, he put great emotional energy into keeping what actors call "the instrument" in good working order. Reagan was ruthlessly efficient at spending time on the things that would keep him in character (his writing, his public appearances, his core convictions, his white-bread cultural diet) and eliminating the things that would distract him (too many meetings, excessive policy detail, determining which criticisms are well founded and taking them seriously). What we see in the diaries of Reagan's family life is heartbreaking: he is a successful touring performer whose work requires not only his own total focus but that of his wife, whom he always calls Mommie. Many of the interactions with his children are angry—the children at him, or, more precisely, at Nancy Reagan for being hypercritical and at Ronald Reagan for his unwillingness to settle family disputes. On one occasion, his son Ron hangs up on him; a few days later, Reagan, at the age of seventy-two, writes, "I'm not talking to him until he apologizes for hanging up on me." The following year, his son Michael calls to complain about Nancy, "& when I tried to straighten him out he screamed at me about having been adopted & hung up on me." Once, Reagan reports that a family meeting has solved everything, but no subsequent scenes of warmth bear this out.

A WALK IN MARCH

This hill
crossed with broken pines and maples
lumpy with the burial mounds of
uprooted hemlocks (hurricane
of '38)   out of their
rotting hearts generations rise
trying once more to become
the forest

just beyond them
tall enough to be called trees
in their youth like aspen a bouquet
of young beech is gathered

they still wear last summer's leaves
the lightest brown almost translucent
how their stubbornness has decorated
the winter woods

on this narrow path ice tries
to keep the black undecaying oak leaves
in its crackling grip   it's become
too hard to walk   at last   a
sunny patch   oh!   i'm in water
to my ankles   APRIL

—*Grace Paley*

And yet Reagan was able to function successfully as President because, in some mysterious way, he could usually sense when his natural rigidity and disconnectedness were going to lead him into trouble, whereupon he would change direction just enough. This is exactly the quality that George W. Bush, who plainly wanted to model his Presidency on Reagan's, doesn't have. Reagan had an uncanny ability to find his way from an ideological instinct to a practical course of action, without admitting, even to himself, that he was doing so. Throughout his Presidency, in domain after domain, he declared himself to be a hundred per cent on one side of an issue—the principled, heroic, unyielding, conservative side—and then, typically, he bent to the exigencies of the situation.

Hundreds of U.S. marines die in a suicide bombing of their barracks in Lebanon in 1983. Reagan declares that he will never listen to the critics who demand that he pull the rest of the marines out—and then, a few months later, he does exactly that. Old friends of Taiwan, like Senator Barry Goldwater, accuse him of tilting too far toward China. Reagan denies it—and then continues to negotiate with the Chinese. Reagan accepts the resignation of the unpopular conservative Anne Burford as head of the Environmental Protection Agency with evidently sincere regret and indignation over the unfair criticisms that she has been forced to endure, then replaces her with the far more moderate William Ruckelshaus. (Then he refers to Ruckelshaus in the diary as Don Rumsfeld.) He represents each of the tax increases that he agreed to after his first round of tax cuts produced enormous budget deficits as an example of his having stoutly refused to raise taxes. In 1987, when his nomination of Douglas Ginsburg to the Supreme Court is in trouble because of Ginsburg's admission that he smoked marijuana years earlier, Reagan writes, "A morning call Bill Bennett wants me to ask Ginsburg to withdraw. I told him that was absolutely impossible. Later a call from Ginsburg that he wanted to withdraw. Well this I couldn't say no to. It looks increasingly that he can not be confirmed & he's taken enough abuse." This is a wonderful instance of Reagan's way of operating, because it so perfectly compresses his standard series of moves, from firm resistance to realistic, but unacknowledged, compromise—done, in Reagan's mind, for Ginsburg's sake, not for his own.

Had Reagan made it his mission to find the consensual center on every issue, he would not have been able to move American politics so far to the right; had he been absolutely true to his convictions, he would have sacrificed enough of his popularity to consign himself to the company of ideological politicians who inspire retrospective admiration for having lost nobly. The most important example of how Reagan's mind worked is, of course, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Reagan ran unsuccessfully for President in 1976 as an opponent of the Richard Nixon–Gerald Ford policy of détente with the Soviets; he specifically promised to fire Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State. In the diaries, we often find him consulting with Kissinger and Nixon on Soviet-American relations. Where George W. Bush is loath to engage in diplomacy with leaders he finds objectionable, Reagan, with a salesman's conviction that he can change the mind of anybody if he's given a face-to-face meeting, muses hopefully about trying to persuade Fidel Castro to cut his ties with the Soviets.

Reagan's reputation has risen steadily since he left office. Republican politicians' constant, incantatory tributes to him—as at the first debate among the Party's 2008 Presidential aspirants, held earlier this month at the Reagan Library—testify to his popularity. To judge from Brinkley's selection, the domestic operations of government hardly ever crossed Reagan's mind; the outstanding item on his résumé is the collapse of Soviet Communism in the years just after he left office. Reagan's fans give him credit for seeing all along that this was a possibility and then working relentlessly and effectively to bring it about. Accordingly, they're inclined to ascribe to him a deep, philosophically grounded sense of the meaning of human liberty, which guided him at every step. John Patrick Diggins, whose book "Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History" was published earlier this year, makes such a case: his Reagan was shaped by Thomas Paine and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and was comparable in Presidential greatness to Abraham Lincoln.

The diaries don't offer much warrant for this view. A better companion to the diaries is "The Education of Ronald Reagan: The General Electric Years and the Untold Story of His Conversion to Conservatism," by an extravagant admirer of Reagan's named Thomas W. Evans, also published earlier this year. By focussing on the decade or so when Reagan was a travelling spokesman for General Electric—a period that he began as a Democrat and ended as a Republican—Evans does a persuasive job of explaining where Reagan's political views came from.

The person who hired Reagan at G.E. was a corporate vice-president, Lemuel Boulware, who has a big fan in Evans. "Although he wore horn-

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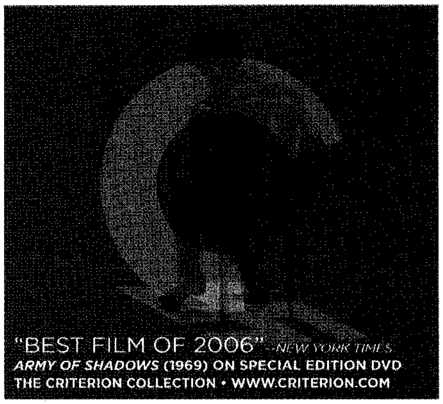

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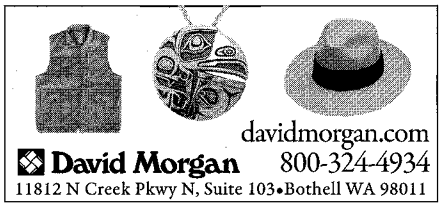

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rimmed glasses and his brown hair was thinning, he exuded power," Evans says of Boulware. "His face had a ruddy glow from weekends spent on the golf course in Westchester." Reagan went to work for G.E. in 1954, a time when labor unions were much more powerful than they are now, and Boulware was a leader of an effort by alarmed corporate executives to counteract labor's growing power. One idea of Boulware's was that labor relations should not be confined to the bargaining table; instead, corporations should send their workers a non-stop message about the benefits of the capitalist system. This was Reagan's mission—he was a spokesman whose audience was G.E.'s own employees as much as the outside world—and, in the course of countless hours spent fulfilling it (he was afraid to fly then, and travelled from plant to plant across the country by train), he developed an oft-repeated speech that, when Reagan participated in the Goldwater Presidential campaign in 1964, became "The Speech," a soaring panegyric about the glories of American free enterprise and the threat of Communism, which was the basis of his political career. In Evans's account, Boulware is the true father of Reaganism.

Evans has assembled a plausible list of other influences on Reagan. They are mostly forgotten purveyors of political and cultural Americana, rather than the great thinkers of Western civilization: Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, whose science-fiction fables for boys were favorite reading of the young Reagan; conservative popular economics writers like Henry Hazlitt, Lawrence Fertig, and Lewis Haney; anti-Communists like John T. Flynn, Robert Strausz-Hupé, and Laurence Beilenson; and political operatives like F. Clifton White. It's also possible to detect in Reagan's speeches and writings echoes of the inspirational sermons that were ubiquitous in early-twentieth-century Middle America, like Elbert Hubbard's "A Message to Garcia," Russell Conwell's "Acres of Diamonds," and Earl Nightingale's "The Strangest Secret." And motifs from old movies consistently found their way into Reagan's political talk, and maybe his thinking, too. Reagan's mind was a battered, capacious old valise stuffed with material he accumulated over the decades.

Reagan was without question more deeply and instinctually anti-Communist than his immediate predecessors, but the diaries don't support the notion that he foresaw the collapse of Soviet Communism. He does muse, just a few days into his Presidency, "Wouldn't we be doing more for their people if we let their system fail instead of constantly bailing it out?," but most of the time he treats the Soviets as increasingly powerful, especially militarily, and on the march.

Indeed, the Iran-Contra affair, Reagan's most costly mistake, is rooted partly in his conviction that a general takeover of Central America by Soviet clients is a dangerous possibility. It's also rooted in the customary mismatch between his tough stated position and his real negotiating position. What got Reagan in trouble was his aides' attempts to accomplish a secret three-cushion diplomatic trick shot: sell arms to Iran, so that it would arrange for the release of American hostages; then use the proceeds of the arms sale to fund the right-wing Contras in Nicaragua, in spite of a congressional ban. He plainly sent the signals that set all this in motion. As early as 1983, more than three years before Iran-Contra broke, he writes, "We have been so restricted by Cong. in our help to the El S. [El Salvador] govt. that they are losing to the Rebels. I finally told the [National Security] Council to come up with how we could be of more help, not whether we should." This isn't a direct order to help the Contras, but it's a clear directive not to wait around for the intent of Congress to emerge when it comes to the struggle against the Central American left.

Reagan proudly reveals to his diary the idea of "a highly secret convoluted process that sees Israel freeing some 20 Hizballahs who aren't really guilty of any blood letting. At the same time they sell Iran some 'Tow' anti-tank weapons. We in turn sell Israel replacements & the Hizballah free our five hostages. Iran also pledges there will be no more kidnappings. We sit quietly & never reveal how we got them back." Reagan was willing to say that he would never negotiate with terrorists or hostage-takers (and, later, to regard the general public perception of the Iran-Contra affair as unfair), but the people around him were right to surmise that he was encouraging them to do just that.

Iran-Contra isn't the only arena of foreign policy where Reagan's judgment proves decidedly fallible. He's not quick to recognize Mikhail Gorbachev as a transformative figure. He believes progress will come in some areas where it has not, like building a shield against nuclear missiles, and fails to see it coming in areas where it has, like Muammar Qaddafi's falling off the list of the world's most threatening figures.

In retrospect, the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavík, Iceland, in October, 1986, was a milestone: the two leaders discussed abolishing all strategic weapons, and thereby showed that they were not completely resistant to and mistrustful of each other, in a way that made perestroika possible. At the time, though, the summit seemed like a humiliating failure, because it ended in disagreement over the United States' proposed launch of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan ends his diary entry for that day by declaring, truculently, "I was mad—he tried to act jovial but I acted mad & it showed." Most of the world thought Reagan was being intransigent, for insisting on his space shield; Reagan thought Gorbachev was being intransigent, for balking; twenty years later, the United States is still nowhere near having a workable defense against nuclear missiles but is much more powerful militarily than it was then. The world does change, but not according to anyone's plan. Reagan's relation to the fall of the Soviet Union brings to mind Tolstoy's maxim in "War and Peace": "It is only unself-conscious activity that bears fruit, and the man who plays a part in a historical drama never understands its true significance." ♦

From the Ellsworth (Maine) American.

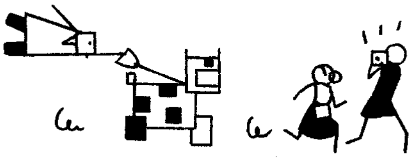
Jim Parker of Civil Engineering Services, representing W/S, said syncopated traffic signals would help traffic flow.

Floor it on the downbeat.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Big Girls, *by Susanna Moore (Knopf; $24).* Set in a women's prison on the Hudson River, Moore's sixth novel chronicles the aftermath of a highly publicized murder and its impact on four intertwined lives. The story is told in the alternating voices of Helen, who has long suffered terrifying schizophrenic hallucinations and is serving a life sentence for killing her two small children; Helen's psychiatrist, a single mother who came to work at the prison out of guilt over a patient's suicide; a corrections officer who becomes involved with the psychiatrist; and an ambitious Hollywood star whom Helen believes to be her sister. Moore gradually probes Helen's psychosis to its horrifying origins, while also delivering a nuanced and devastating account of the fights, rapes, and alliances built from necessity that constitute prison life.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist, *by Mohsin Hamid (Harcourt; $22).* "I am a lover of America," the young Pakistani narrator of this lucid, unsettling novel begins. In the course of a single day and night, he divulges to a mysterious and possibly menacing American his love affair with this country: embraced first by Princeton, then by a New York firm of business analysts, and finally by the beautiful daughter of a patrician Upper East Side family. Throughout his brilliant trajectory, however, he is troubled by the easy, almost insolent sense of superiority in his American peers, who take for granted their status as sons of empire. Only in the wake of the September 11th attacks, when America's wrath turns toward his homeland, does he realize that he has become a latter-day janissary—akin to the children of defeated nations who, conscripted into the army of the enemy, "fought to erase their own civilizations."



Twice as Good, *by Marcus Mabry (Modern Times; $27.50).* President George W. Bush has said of Condoleezza Rice, "Whatever she says, it's like talking to me." Mabry writes that many of Rice's sponsors, from Brent Scowcroft to a Marxist professor, have felt the same affinity, each to be "left scratching his head as he saw Rice make a 180-degree turn away from the core beliefs he thought they shared." Mabry, who had Rice's coöperation here, succeeds in giving coherence to her character, from her roots in segregated Birmingham—where her middle-class parents were both inspired and mortified by Martin Luther King's radicalism—to her broken engagement to the 1975 N.F.L. Rookie of the Year and her bond with George Bush. On Iraq, Mabry has less to offer, in part, perhaps, because of his subject's detachment; her supreme self-confidence, he writes, has made it hard for her to recognize the disaster unfolding on her watch.

Are We Rome?, *by Cullen Murphy (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* Murphy writes that "Americans have been casting eyes back to ancient Rome since before the Revolution," and goes on to interrogate the comparisons drawn both by "triumphalists," who see the world's only superpower in terms of the Roman Empire at its height, and by "declinists," who see America as "dangerously overcommitted abroad and rusted out at home," like Rome before its fall. Murphy makes telling points about the solipsism of political élites and the impact of corruption and cronyism on civil society, but he stops short of predicting America's fall. (Indeed, he argues that it is simplistic to say that Rome fell.) Instead, he points to a malaise exemplified by the debasement of the term "franchise," once associated with freedom to vote, and now with commerce: "Here, in miniature, is the political history of America." Murphy prescribes antidotes, and finds grounds for cautious optimism in the words of Livy: "An empire remains powerful so long as its subjects rejoice in it."

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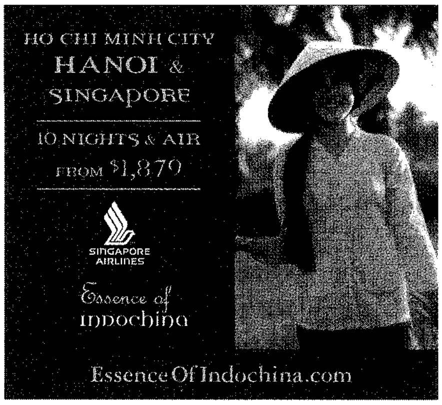

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BOOKS

THE SEVENTH DAY

Why the Six-Day War is still being fought.

BY DAVID REMNICK

In June, 2003, President Bush tried to discredit any critics who dared dispute his artfully twisted intelligence assessments of Iraq by slinging the worst name he could think of: "Revisionist historians is what I like to call them." This was intended as something more than a schoolyard taunt or an allusion to the sort of pseudo scholars who would deny, under a blizzard of footnotes, the existence of the Turkish massacre of Armenians. In the political context of the moment, it seemed a warning to all who would dispute the monarch's version of reality.

Rigorous revisionism is, of course, at the heart of historical practice, and to practice it in the face of a state-endorsed orthodoxy can require a considerable measure of gall, as well as craft. No country easily accepts a figure like Charles Beard, who, as the avatar of the Progressive School of historians, informed Americans that the founders were wealthy landholders employing ideological trappings to garland their self-interest. But, without revision, what? Without Marcel Ophüls, who practices a filmmaker's version of revisionist history in "The Sorrow and the Pity," it would have been far easier for the French to go on ignoring their complicity in the deportation of Jews to the death camps. The assault on the American Indians; the ruthlessness of European colonialism in Africa; the decision-making process that led to Hiroshima; the reëvaluation of Presidential reputations—these are all, unendingly, fodder for "revisionists" who go on challenging accepted truths and complicating the story of the past.

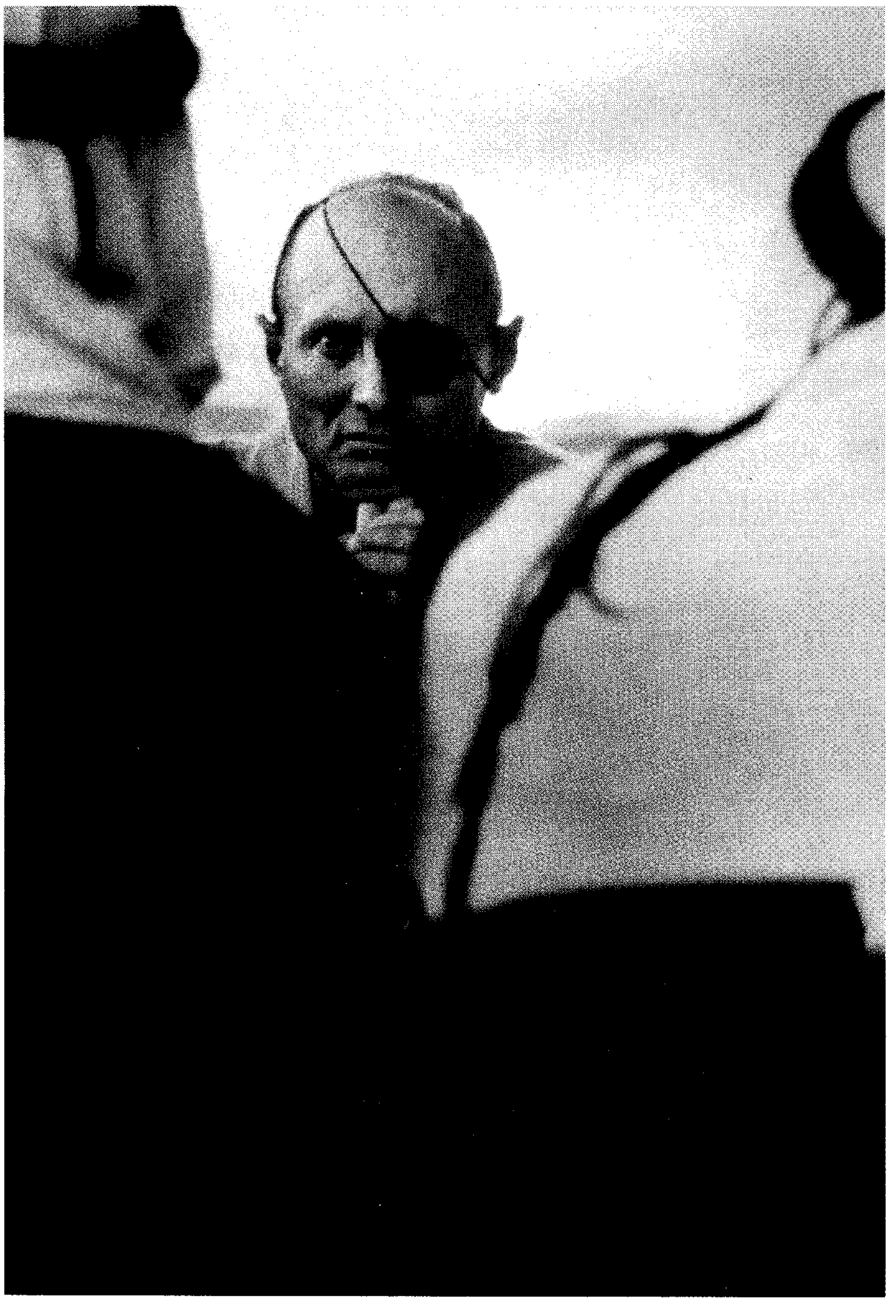
Nowhere has revisionist history played a more crucial role in the political and moral consciousness of a nation than in Israel. The state came into being in 1948, and, almost immediately, its prehistory—the origins of Zionist ideology, the behavior of the British during the Mandate period, and, critically, the relationship with the Other, the Palestinian Arabs—became matter for schoolbooks, journalism, military indoctrination, scholarship, and public rhetoric. The founding generation that had come to Palestine and then fought what it called its war of independence against Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and other hostile neighbors was now in charge of its own story. To the victor goes the narrative. As in any fledgling state, that narrative tended to be set down in the most glorious terms—history as if written by a Hebrew-speaking Parson Weems. For a while, it was as if even the most basic facts could be wished out of existence. An entire group could be made invisible. "There was no such thing as Palestinians," Golda Meir said in 1969.

It was not until the nineteen-eighties, after the opening of various state archives and the coming of age of a generation more disillusioned and less beholden to the old myths than the founders, that Israeli scholars began to confront some inconvenient facts. The most important of the Israeli New Historians was Benny Morris, a leftist (at the time) who had taken part in the disastrous Lebanon war both as a soldier and as a reporter, and who then went to jail rather than complete reserve duty in the West Bank during the first Palestinian intifada. In 1987, the year the intifada erupted, Morris published "The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949," in which he demolished a cherished Israeli notion: that the three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs who fled their villages during and after the war did so voluntarily and at the behest of their own leaders, who promised they could soon return. Instead, Morris made clear, a large number of the Palestinians were expelled by Israeli military leaders (including the young Yitzhak Rabin), and many others fled out of fear after hearing about the killings and the destruction of homes in nearby villages.

Most of the New Historians did their doctoral work abroad, which gave them a chance to question the narrative they had grown up with. And, though they were never a cohesive school, personally or ideologically, their work did come in a kind of wave that challenged traditional Israeli historiography. After Morris came Ilan Pappe's "Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," Avi Shlaim's "Collusion Across the Jordan," and work by the sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, which described the ideology of Zionism in colonial terms. Critics accused the New Historians of politically tendentious readings of the archives, of slandering a people that had barely escaped extermination, and of trying to undermine the foundations of the state. In the liberal daily *Ha'aretz*, the novelist Aharon Megged asked, "What is it that moves Israeli scholars to distort and make ugly the Jewish national liberation movement, whose only desire was to realize the two-thousand-year-old hope to return to Zion?"

Over time, though, the best revisionist scholarship had an effect on Israeli political thinking, even among some public officials. Shlomo Ben-Ami, who served as Ehud Barak's minister of public security and, later, his foreign minister, wrote in his memoiristic history of the state, "Scars of War, Wounds of Peace," published last year, that the expulsions of Palestinians in 1947 and 1948 were due to "an ideological predisposition, a mental attitude, a supporting cultural environment" that allowed such cruelty in the first place. It is hard to believe that, without the New Historians, an Israeli official could have brought himself to such self-critical conclusions.

Tom Segev, who has just published, in English, an account of the most pivotal of all the Arab-Israeli wars, "1967: Israel, the War and the Year That Transformed the Middle East" (Metropolitan; $35), is the most journalistic of the New Historians. His style is drier and more distanced than that of some of his more overtly ideological colleagues; for years, his domestic-affairs column in *Ha'aretz* was called "Foreign Correspondent." Segev's parents fled Germany for Palestine in 1935, and his father was killed in the 1948 war. Segev, who received his doctorate from Boston University, has been a consistent voice on the Israeli



Moshe Dayan at the Qalandia refugee camp, West Bank, 1967.

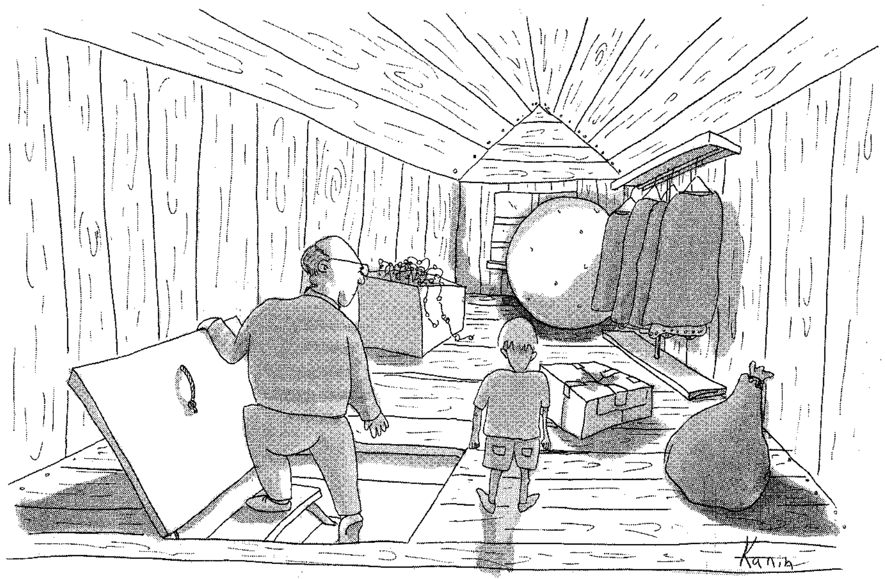
MICHA BAR-AM/MAGNUM

left, but his views are generally more tempered than the anti-Zionist leftism of Pappe and the sui-generis politics of Benny Morris, who, after the failed summit at Camp David in 2000, despairingly came to believe that David Ben-Gurion should have expelled many more Palestinians "when he had the chance," in order to insure a Jewish majority and Israeli security.

Segev, who is sixty-two, has written books on the nascent state ("1949: The First Israelis"), on the Jews and the Arabs under the British Mandate ("One Palestine, Complete"), and on the "post-Zionist" Americanization of Israeli society ("Elvis in Jerusalem"). In "1949," he helped upend the notion of the early Israelis as an unambiguously homogeneous pioneer society, presenting evidence that, from the very beginning, there were troubling divisions between Arabs and Jews, religious and secular Jews, Europeans and North Africans. Segev's most controversial book was "The Seventh Million," in which he wrote about the Zionist movement's inability to help the Jews of Europe as they were being slaughtered, and the afterlife of the Holocaust as an emotionally charged issue in Israeli society. The book, which was greeted with some of the same disdain that met Hannah Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem," described the Zionist pioneers' embarrassment at the lack of widespread rebellion against the Nazis among the European Jews, and showed how survivors were received in Israel not only with relief but also, at times, with suspicion and bureaucratic indifference. Segev won few friends among the Israeli establishment when he quoted Ben-Gurion as saying in 1938, "If I knew that it was possible to save all the children in Germany by transporting them to England, but only half of them by transporting them to Palestine, I would choose the second—because we face not only the reckoning of those children, but the historical reckoning of the Jewish people."

For the Israelis, the 1967 war was a triumph of such miraculous speed and fantastic territorial consequences that its leading military commander, Moshe Dayan, quickly helped brand it "the Six-Day War"—a deliberate echo of the six days of creation in Genesis. (In the Arab world, the defeat was such a humiliation that when it was spoken of at all it was commonly referred to as *an-naksah*, the "setback," an echo of *al-nakba*, the "catastrophe," of 1948.) The Israeli victory changed the country in nearly every aspect. The response, both within the country and among Jews abroad, ranged from the joyful to the distinctly messianic—a messianism that helped lead to the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Sinai, and the Golan Heights, and the establishment of one settlement after another. It was a war that Israelis regarded as existential in importance—defeat could well have meant the end of the state after less than twenty years—and yet winning had Pyrrhic consequences. Out of it came forty years of occupation, widespread illegal settlements, the intensification of Palestinian nationalism, terrorism, counterattacks, checkpoints, failed negotiations, uprisings, and ever-deepening distrust. What greater paradox of history: a war that *must* be won, a victory that results in consuming misery and instability.

How did it all happen? Why was it fought at all? Segev is far from the first historian to argue that the 1967 war resembled less the David-and-Goliath narrative popularized by romantic propagandists than a multi-sided tragic



NED AND BOBBY TILSON DISCOVER A DWARF PLANET IN THEIR ATTIC.

march to folly. Even Michael Oren, a historian well to the political right of Segev, does not fail, in his own valuable book, "Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East," to account for the mistakes, miscommunications, random events, and lethal vanities on both sides.

In the mid-nineteen-sixties, Israeli society was in the doldrums. The economy was suffering a recession. The Ashkenazim, the European-born Israelis, who were the nation's pioneer aristocrats, were seeing themselves eclipsed demographically by generally less educated and more religious Mizrahim, immigrants from North Africa and other Muslim countries. The pioneers' socialist ethos began to decline, along with the kibbutz population. Also, the country was no longer in the hands of Ben-Gurion, the country's first and most charismatic leader. His successor, Levi Eshkol, was a dull and windy specialist in finance and resource management, who hadn't had a strong military career.

Although Israel had fought successfully in the muddled Suez Crisis, in 1956, by the mid-sixties it was facing a series of pressing security problems: the anti-colonial ideology of pan-Arab nationalism was at its peak. The Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, won a mass following throughout the Arab world with rousing speeches aimed at the "liberation" of Palestinian lands and the elimination of the "alien" Israeli state. Fledgling Palestinian guerrilla groups, especially Fatah, were carrying out attacks on Israeli territory mainly from bases across the border in Syria and, to a lesser extent, Jordan. In the eighteen months before the 1967 war, there were a hundred and twenty attempts at sabotage by Palestinians—bombed water pumps, land mines, skirmishes along various highways. Only eleven Israelis were killed in those incidents, a small number by today's standards, but, Segev writes, their "psychological effect, like that of the recession, was far more profound than the tangible damage."

In November, 1966, after three Israeli paratroopers were killed by a land mine planted near the Negev town of Arad, Eshkol ordered Operation Shredder, a retaliatory strike on a rural area in western Jordan. In the village of Samua, the Israel Defense Forces blew up a medical clinic, a school, a post office, a library, a coffee shop, and more than a hundred houses. The operation so exceeded the Cabinet's directives that it led to an aerial battle between the two air forces and left fourteen Jordanians dead. The misjudgment was not just the excessive force; it was the decision to attack Jordan, whose king, Hussein, had been the most conciliatory of all the Arab leaders. Syria, which gave safe haven to Palestinian guerrillas and had plans to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River from Israel, was the clearer problem. The Israelis had played a risky cat-and-mouse game with the Syrians in the Golan Heights but had never attacked, as they had at Samua. "We meant to give the mother-in-law a pinch," Eshkol said later, "but instead we beat up the bride."

By the spring of 1967, tensions had begun to escalate. Soviet diplomats informed Syria and Egypt, wrongly, that Israel was about to launch a full-scale invasion of Syria, further inflaming Nasser. According to "Foxbats Over Dimona" (Yale; $26), a new book by the Israeli writers Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, the Soviet Union was so anxious about Israel's nuclear capabilities that it did everything it could to provoke a war. At the same time, the Americans, obsessed with the catastrophic war in Vietnam, were offering little assurance of help—"Israel will not be alone unless it decides to do it alone," Lyndon Johnson, delphically, told Abba Eban, Israel's foreign minister—and Charles de Gaulle, who had supplied Israel with Mirage and Mystère fighters, the core of the Israeli Air Force, now refused support, darkly warning Eshkol against a preëmptive attack. Israel felt isolated, Egypt emboldened. Field Marshal Abd al-Hakim Amer, Egypt's top military official, assured Nasser that the Army was ready, if necessary, to attack Israel and win.

In the second half of May, Nasser made one provocative move after another. Although his own intelligence officers told him that Israeli troops were not massing on the Syrian border, he pressed forward. On May 16th, he told the United Nations to remove from Sinai its international forces, which had maintained the peace since the Suez Crisis. U Thant, the Secretary-General, was ineffectual in his efforts to persuade Nasser to let the troops remain and, without consulting the Security Council, acquiesced. Once the international forces left, Nasser sent his own armored divisions right up to the Israeli border. On May 22nd, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, cutting off Israel's access to the Red Sea. Since 1957, the Israelis had said that such a blockade would be considered a casus belli, but when Israeli diplomats appealed to the United States and Great Britain for help both maintained their neutrality. On the thirtieth, Nasser signed a defense pact with King Hussein, after having declared, “Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel.” He said that Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon are “poised on the borders of Israel” and would be backed by Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan, “and the whole Arab nation. This act will astound the world. . . . The critical hour has arrived.” It was this kind of language, coming little more than two decades after the Holocaust, that allowed Menachem Begin to call Nasser “the Arab Hitler.” The Syrian, Iraqi, and Palestinian leaderships all made similar declarations about erasing Israel from the map.

Nevertheless, even in late May and the first few days of June the Israeli leadership continued to debate Nasser’s ultimate intentions; the military almost unanimously favored a preëmptive strike against the Arabs, but others—including Eshkol, Abba Eban, and Ben-Gurion in his retirement—cautioned against overreaction. When Nasser spoke to the Soviets, he was counselled against striking first. “Nasser did not want war,” Eban later wrote. “He wanted victory without war.” After the war, even some right-wing politicians, including Menachem Begin, admitted that the Israelis had never been sure that Nasser wanted war. “The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us,” Begin said in a speech to the Israel National Defense College. “We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

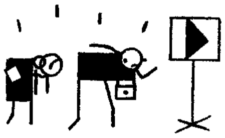
Both Segev and Oren describe in alarming detail the state of anxiety and disarray in the Israeli leadership. During the crisis, Yitzhak Rabin, the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, suffered a nervous breakdown, for which he later blamed “nicotine poisoning.” There was fear that Egypt would bomb the Dimona nuclear plant. There was fear of a two- or three-front surprise attack, of chemical gas, of radioactive weapons. The military leadership and even liberal media like *Ha’aretz* saw Eshkol as weak, incapable of leading the country in crisis—an impression that hardened when, on May 28th, he gave a radio address that was a stammering, confused disaster. Eshkol, who had barely slept and was trying to read his text after cataract surgery, panicked the nation even as he tried to reassure it.

Meanwhile, rabbis were consecrating parks as cemeteries, and thousands of graves were dug. In the press and within the Cabinet, there were calls for Eshkol’s resignation as Prime Minister and defense minister; Ben-Gurion was so worried about the possibility of a military coup that he issued a public warning from Sde Boker, his kibbutz in the Negev. Just four days before the war, Eshkol was forced to give up the defense portfolio to the most unpredictable figure in the country, Moshe Dayan.

Eshkol remained unsure of what to do. “Must we live by the sword forever?” he asked his generals. The government had always given the Army all it asked for, Eshkol said, but “you didn’t get all that matériel so that one day we would get up and say, Now we can destroy the Egyptian Army—so let’s do it.”

Michael Oren, who spent more time studying the Arab memoirs and available literature than Segev, places greater emphasis in his book on Nasser’s malevolent intentions, arguing that a full-scale invasion plan, Operation Dawn, was cancelled only at the last moment. He quotes this from Salah al-Hadidi, the chief justice in the trials that Egypt convened for officers held accountable for the defeat: “I can state that Egypt’s political leadership called Israel to war. It clearly provoked Israel and forced it into a confrontation.” Segev is less sympathetic toward Israel’s decision to attack first. While Eshkol was withstanding the pressure from his generals, Segev writes, he emerged as a “statesman with nerves of steel.” But, unlike Ben-Gurion, he did not have the stature to resist. “His weakness ate away at him,” Segev concludes. “He wanted to be remembered as a patriot, and at this point the public equated patriotism with war.”

The Israeli leadership ultimately justified a preëmptive attack as the only way to end an unbearable threat and, if war must come, to prevent huge casualties. Eshkol, who had for weeks resisted the pleas and imprecations of his generals and ministers, now asked, “Must we allow ourselves to be worn down and killed bit by bit, if not destroyed in a future all-out war, as promised by Nasser? Must we wait for Hannah Arendt to write articles about our failure to resist?”



On June 5th, at 7:10 A.M., Israeli fighter jets launched an early-morning air assault on Egypt’s airfields, effectively destroying Nasser’s Air Force on the ground and, in just a few hours, deciding the course of the war. On the sixth and the seventh, Israel, exploiting its dominance of the skies, shattered Egypt’s ground forces.

The six days of fighting between Israel and the combined forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria is the most straightforward aspect of the drama. In just a hundred and thirty-two hours, Israel captured the Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the holy sites and the Old City, from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria—twenty-six thousand square miles of additional territory. At first, Radio Cairo assured listeners that the Egyptians were winning great battles against the Israelis. Nasser’s deputy and eventual successor, Anwar Sadat, who knew the truth, took a nighttime walk in his Cairo neighborhood, “dazed and brokenhearted,” as he wrote in his memoirs, and saw people dancing in the streets to celebrate their “victory.” Nasser’s dream of a pan-Arab nation, of eliminating Israel, was finished. “If I had known the Army wasn’t ready,” Nasser said, “I wouldn’t have gone to war. I’m a chess player.” (Nasser and Eshkol both died within the next few years.) Egypt lost more than fifteen thousand men in the war, Israel about eight hundred. Rabin wrote in his memoirs that the Israelis easily could have taken Cairo, Amman, and Damascus.

So profound was the Israeli national delirium in the days and weeks after the war that it was impossible for most Israelis to think straight about the long-term consequences of retaining conquered territory. After being told that the state was in mortal danger, Israel was now in possession of Biblical Israel—the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, all of Jerusalem, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, in Hebron, and many other such sites scattered throughout the West Bank. Once the Old City was secured, on the third day of the war, Dayan, the most theatrical of all Israeli commanders, flew by helicopter to Jerusalem and staged his arrival in the manner of General Allenby, the British general who took Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917. "We have returned to the most holy of our places," Dayan declared. "We have returned, never to part from them again."

General Shlomo Goren, the chief rabbi of the I.D.F., blew a shofar at the Western Wall and advised his commanding officer, Uzi Narkis, that now was the moment to blow up the Dome of the Rock, the mosque that sits on the Temple Mount. "Do this and you will go down in history," Goren said. "Tomorrow might be too late."

Narkis refused the lunatic suggestion and even threatened the rabbi with arrest. Nevertheless, the national poet, Natan Alterman, was accurate in declaring, "The people are drunk with joy." A photograph of a weeping I.D.F. soldier at the Western Wall was published all over the world and seemed to embody the new conflation, for many Israelis, of the state and the sacred, the military and the messianic. The song "Jerusalem of Gold" displaced, for a time, the traditional anthem "Hatikvah." In the daily *Ma'ariv*, the journalist Gabriel Tzifroni described the "liberation" of the capital in terms rarely used in traditional news reporting: "The Messiah came to Jerusalem yesterday—he was tired and gray, and he rode in on a tank." When the fighting broke out, Ben-Gurion had written in his diary, "There was no need for this. I believe it is a grievous mistake." But now Ben-Gurion was suggesting that the walls of the Old City be destroyed. Eshkol himself, posing the question of how Israel was going to rule a million Arabs, briefly considered a plan of transferring hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to Iraq and elsewhere.

Since 1949, there had been talk of "recapturing" the holy sites of the West Bank and Jerusalem—most Israeli generals still considered 1948 to be unfinished business, just as their Arab opponents did—but permanent conquest had never been, as policy, the goal of the war. Occupation was to be temporary. And then it wasn't. Under the bizarre and often harsh leadership of Moshe Dayan—"the mysterious Cyclops of Israeli politics," in the words of the distinguished historian and journalist Amos Elon—the Israelis thought of themselves as "enlightened occupiers," and yet in time they resorted to many of the methods employed by the British colonials during the Mandate period: collective punishment, torture during interrogation, the demolition of Arab homes. Israel also expelled entire Arab communities and destroyed villages; around two hundred thousand Arabs fled the West Bank for Jordan. Israeli forces destroyed the villages of Beit Mirsim and Beit Awa, in the southern West Bank; nearly a third of the city of Qalqilya was razed before the U.N. and the United States demanded that Dayan stop and rebuild. In the meantime, religious Zionist leaders such as Zvi Yehudah Kook, of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, in Jerusalem, and Moshe Levinger, a founder of the Gush Emunim settler movement and the settlement in Hebron, went from being marginal dreamers to armed prophets and politicians.

The Israeli leadership could not conceive of itself as anything less than benign, and even persuaded itself that a subjugated Arab population would come to appreciate its overlords. "The situation between us," Dayan creepily informed the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan, "is like the complex relationship between a Bedouin man and the young girl he has taken against her wishes. But when their children are born, they will see the man as their father and the woman as their mother. The initial act will mean nothing to them. You, the Palestinians, as a nation, do not want us today, but we will change your attitude by imposing our presence upon you."

Segev's and Oren's books have their limitations. Segev, by design, ignores the Arab political situation and seems reluctant to credit the Israelis with a legitimate sense of threat; Oren, a more versatile scholar, has taken great pains to read whatever Arab sources are available (most archives are closed) and is more at home

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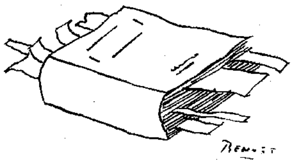

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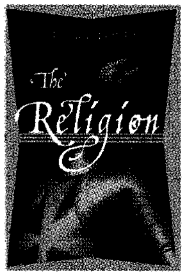

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Illustration by Benoît van Innis.

with big power politics, but he tends to scant the negative aspects of victory and conquest.

The most complete book on the war's aftermath—the "seventh day"—is the journalist Gershom Gorenberg's riveting and deeply depressing "The Accidental Empire," which describes how, in the decade following the war, the mainstream Labor governments of Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, and Yitzhak Rabin either feigned ignorance of the growing settlements or blatantly encouraged them. As a result, they helped to legitimize the settlement ideology of their right-wing successors Menachem Begin, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Ariel Sharon. Gorenberg makes clear that, though the Israelis at first designated the early settlements "temporary" military outposts, in order to avoid violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, "the purpose of settlement, since the day in July 1967 when the first Israeli settler climbed out of a jeep in the Syrian heights, had been to create facts that would determine the final status of the land, to sculpt the political reality before negotiations ever got under way." Here the project of revisionism was neither scholarly nor benign; the creation of "facts on the ground" was a political attempt to rewrite, with bricks and mortar, the contours of one nation at the expense of another.

In those early days of postwar euphoria, there were a few prominent Israelis who dared to warn of the moral and political degradation that would come with the occupation. The novelist Amos Oz wrote prophetically in the newspaper *Davar:*

> For a month, for a year, or for a whole generation we will have to sit as occupiers in places that touch our hearts with their history. And we must remember: as occupiers, because there is no alternative. And as a pressure tactic to hasten peace. Not as saviors or liberators. Only in the twilight of myths can one speak of the liberation of a land struggling under a foreign yoke. Land is not enslaved and there is no such thing as a liberation of lands. There are enslaved people, and the word "liberation" applies only to human beings. We have not liberated Hebron and Ramallah and El-Arish, nor have we redeemed their inhabitants. We have conquered them and we are going to rule over them only until our peace is secured.

But who was listening? Oz was just twenty-eight at the time. An isolated minister or intellectual might speak of "land for peace," but the emotional tide of the country was against it. The ennui had lifted. A new kind of Zionist, one that fused faith and nationalism, replaced the old pioneers, the kibbutzniks. And, with time, the settlements became a matter of literal concrete facts; flimsy outposts were transformed into suburban bedroom communities with government subsidies and short commutes to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Forty years later, a quarter of a million Israelis live in a hundred and twenty officially recognized settlements; an additional hundred and eighty thousand live in annexed areas of East Jerusalem, and sixteen thousand in the Golan. In the years before Israel was established, settlers argued that the more land they bought or seized, the greater their security. The settlers of "Greater Israel" and their supporters, who regarded the old borders as "Auschwitz frontiers," refused to see the peril in their policy. The worst consequence of occupation, of course, has been the terrible privations, physical isolation, and psychological disfigurement that it has imposed upon the Palestinians. For the Israelis, occupation has been, as Gorenberg describes, a grave security hazard and source of moral corrosion.

A nation's ongoing process of assessing its past to chart its future is hardly an academic exercise. Revisionist history has played a role, but political folly on both sides has overwhelmed it in importance. The insistence on further settlement, the failures of the Palestinian leadership to respond to Israeli offers during the negotiating process at Camp David and Taba; the rise of suicide bombing, martyr worship, Islamist ideology, and internecine violence; the myriad misjudgments of the Olmert government—all have deepened the sense of hopelessness. At the moment, Palestinian support for a two-state solution has plummeted, and the settler movement is, once more, the strongest lobby in the country. The war of 1967 casts a shadow still. As the Duke of Wellington said, the only thing worse than a great victory is a great defeat. ♦

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KISS OF LIFE

Tennessee Williams on a romantic reawakening.

BY JOHN LAHR

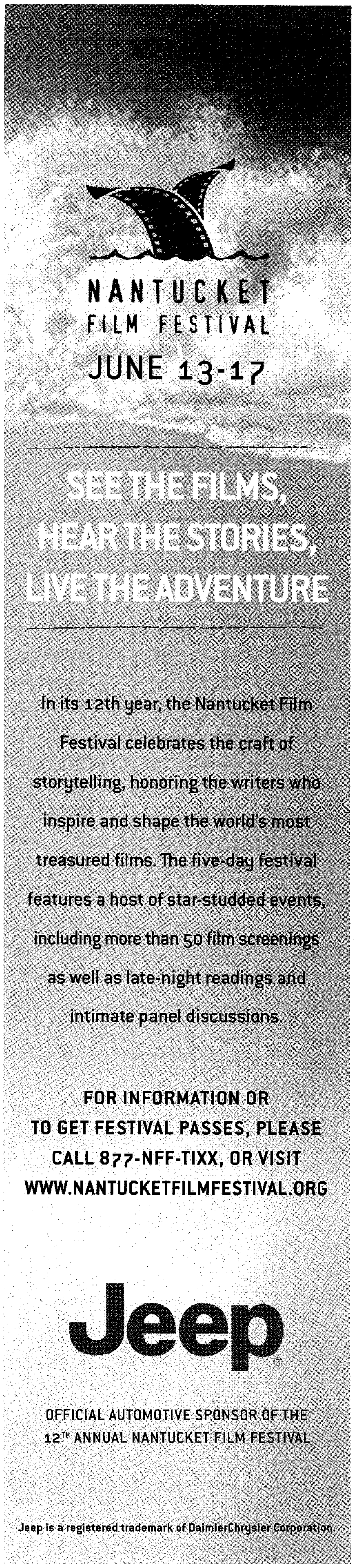
On December 30, 1947, the thirty-six-year-old Tennessee Williams boarded a ship bound for France, sailing away from America and from the tumultuous success on Broadway, only a few weeks earlier, of "A Streetcar Named Desire." Almost immediately, he hit creative still water, finding it "frightfully hard to discover a new vein of material." When, in late 1948, his play "Summer and Smoke" failed on Broadway, Williams's confidence dipped still further; he felt, he said, like a "discredited old conjurer." To his champion Brooks Atkinson, the drama critic of the *Times*, he wrote in June, 1949, "The trouble is that you can't make any real philosophical progress in a couple of years. The scope of understanding enlarges quite slowly, if it enlarges at all, and the scope of interest seems to wait upon understanding. . . . All artists who work from the inside out, have all the same problem: they cannot make sudden, arbitrary changes of matter and treatment until the inner man is ripe for it."

During this stalled period, Williams was falling in love with Frank Merlo, a high-spirited twenty-five-year-old Sicilian-American, who was to be his companion and factotum for the next fourteen years. Merlo's steadfastness stabilized Williams and brought him unexpected happiness. "He was so close to life," he said. "He tied me down to earth." Williams's theatrical testament to this romance is the 1950 comedy "The Rose Tattoo," which is generally considered the runt of his major plays. The current expert revival now at London's Royal National (under the robust direction of Nicholas Hytner and the late Steven Pimlott), however, adds new lustre to the text—and reinforces the role that the National has played over the past decade in resuscitating Williams's international reputation.

Williams dedicated "The Rose Tattoo" to Merlo, whose rambunctiousness and decency, along with his olive skin and sculpted physique, are incarnated here in the clownish Alvaro Mangiacavallo ("My name . . . means 'Eat-a-horse,' " he explains), who brings the inconsolable self-dramatizing seamstress Serafina della Rose back to life. Beneath the hubbub of the play's setting, in a Sicilian neighborhood of an American Gulf Coast town, Williams finally discovers a new thematic note: the joy of deliverance from creative and emotional impasse.

At the National, even before the play begins, the battle of opposing spiritual forces—life vs. death is a constant motif in Williams—is signalled by two dress-making dummies that stand behind Serafina's sewing machine: one wears a white wedding dress, the other black widow's weeds. They are intended, according to the stage directions, to "face each other in violent attitudes, as though having a shrill argument." If Mark Thompson's shrewd stage design doesn't quite follow Williams's symbolic directions, it is eloquent in its ability to capture the deeper implications of Serafina's hysteria. Her bungalow is positioned in front of a scrim of mackerel sky and revolves, like a sort of clapboard Rubik's Cube, to reveal a gaudy, cluttered interior. When we first see her, Serafina (the superb Zoë Wanamaker) is poised on the sofa, eagerly awaiting the return of her husband, Rosario, a truck driver. Her appearance—she "looks like a plump little Italian opera singer in the role of Madame Butterfly," Williams says—hints at her comically grandiose and romantic core.

Almost immediately, Williams introduces two messengers of disenchantment: a local healer who tries to sell Serafina a powder to decrease male goatishness, and a light-fingered female customer who steals a framed photograph of Rosario while urgently requiring a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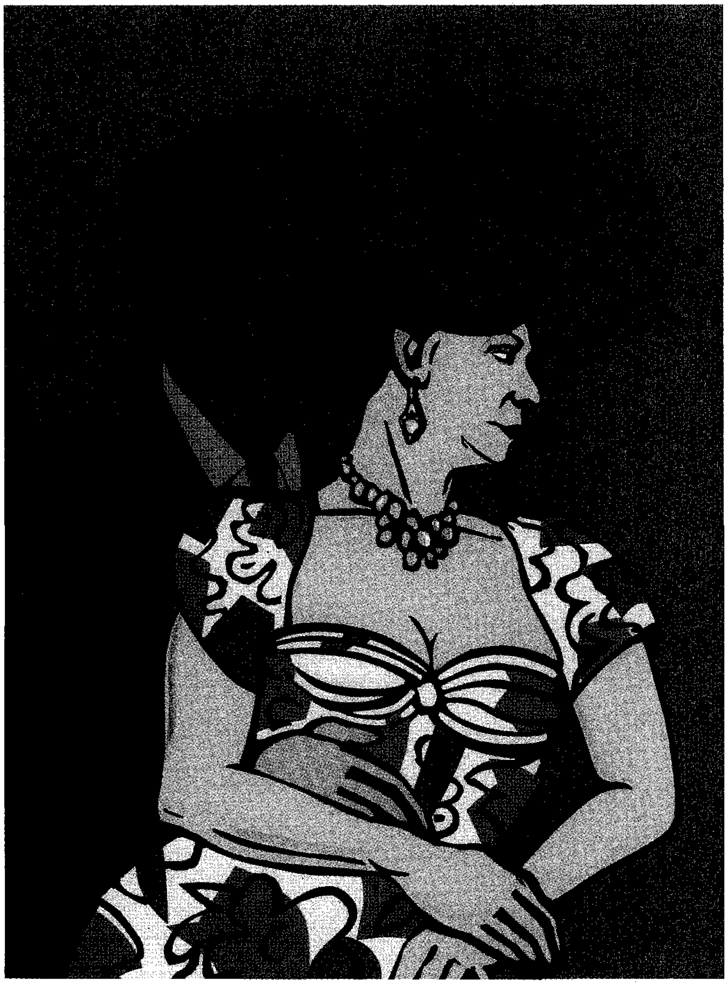
shirt made from rose-colored silk for a man who is "wild like a Gypsy." The audience may twig to Rosario's misbehavior at this point, but Serafina remains staunchly under her own romantic spell. She idealizes Rosario's pedigree and his passion; and, in the process, of course, she inflates herself. (She claims that her drug-smuggling husband is of noble lineage; the Baronessa is the community's tongue-in-cheek nickname for her.) "For love I make characters in plays," Williams famously wrote; likewise, Serafina constructs a sustaining fiction. From Rosario's absence, she invents a permanent presence. "The memory of the rose in my heart is perfect!" she says. Such is their union, she claims, that a rose-shaped tattoo similar to the one on Rosario's chest appeared on her breast—a sort of stigmata—at the moment of conception of their second child, with whom she is pregnant. Serafina hymns Rosario's hair, his chest, his lovemaking; she counts the exact number of nights—four thousand three hundred and eighty—that they have spent together in their twelve-year marriage. "Each time is the first time with him," she says. "Time doesn't pass."


Darrell D'Silva and Zoë Wanamaker in "The Rose Tattoo."

ANDRZEJ KLIMOWSKI

When Rosario is killed and Serafina, in her grief, loses the baby, her melancholy becomes morbid. She can't part with Rosario's body; against the wishes of the Church, she keeps his purified ashes in an urn on the mantelpiece. For the next three years, she locks herself away, alone with her uncontested memories. To keep her vision of the marriage bright, she represses any shadow of doubt. "To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion," she tells the local priest. "Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories only! But it is still beautiful to me and I don't believe that the man in my heart gave me horns!" Serafina's abiding emotion turns out to be a passion for ignorance; she's "a female ostrich," one neighbor rightly observes.

Nonetheless, suspicion breaks through in fragments of remembered dialogue. "He was—wild like a—Gypsy," she says. " 'Wild—like a—Gypsy'? Who said that?—I hate to start to remember, and then not remember." In fact, her performance of grief is an act of disremembering, a defensive strategy of radical innocence. This extends to her teen-age daughter, Rosa (the fetching Susannah Fielding), whom she tries to prevent from taking her final exams and from seeing a young sailor she has fallen for. Rosa, at her graduation, is awarded, in addition to her diploma, "The Digest of Knowledge"; for Williams, sex always marks the beginning of knowledge, and carnality arrives here in the shape of Mangiacavallo (the excellent Darrell D'Silva), another truck driver.

The uncouth Mangiacavallo—another of Williams's primitives—seeks refuge in Serafina's house in order to have a cry after losing a fistfight. "I always cry after a fight," he tells her. "But I don't want people to see me. It's not like a man." He is humiliated, vulnerable, down to earth, honest; he has no pedigree (he is "the grandson of the village idiot," he says) or property ("Love and affection is what I got to offer"). He is, psychologically speaking, everything that Serafina is not. Inevitably, as Williams's stage directions instruct, there is a "profound unconscious response" between them. Mangiacavallo's pragmatism punctures Serafina's grandiosity. When she learns the name of Rosario's mistress, a blackjack dealer at a local casino, and sets off to stab her with a kitchen knife, Mangiacavallo literally and figuratively disarms her. He calls the woman and confirms Rosario's infidelity. Wanamaker, who has a fine, fierce sense of comedy, makes this moment of disillusionment sensational. As in all fairy tales, it is not the enchanted but the disenchanted who are free. Rosario's ashes are scattered; Serafina's desire returns. Tears give way to laughter, and time—in the form of a Bulova watch that Serafina buys for her daughter—resumes. Williams's heroine is no longer out of time but in the moment.

At the finale, the shirtless Mangiacavallo hides on the embankment above the house; in order to coax him back down, Serafina throws the disputed rose-colored silk shirt to the town folk, who rush it up the embankment, "like a streak of flame shooting up a dry hill," the stage directions read. It's a gorgeous, beautifully managed image of desire. The shirt, once a totem of humiliation, is transformed into a semaphore of hope. As Serafina, too, heads up the embankment, she is finally in motion, moving forward. Although the scene has its own poetic theatrical integrity, for those who know Williams's story it also marks a poignant, pivotal moment when life held out a brief reprieve from what he called the "little cave of consciousness." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

NOT KIDS' STUFF

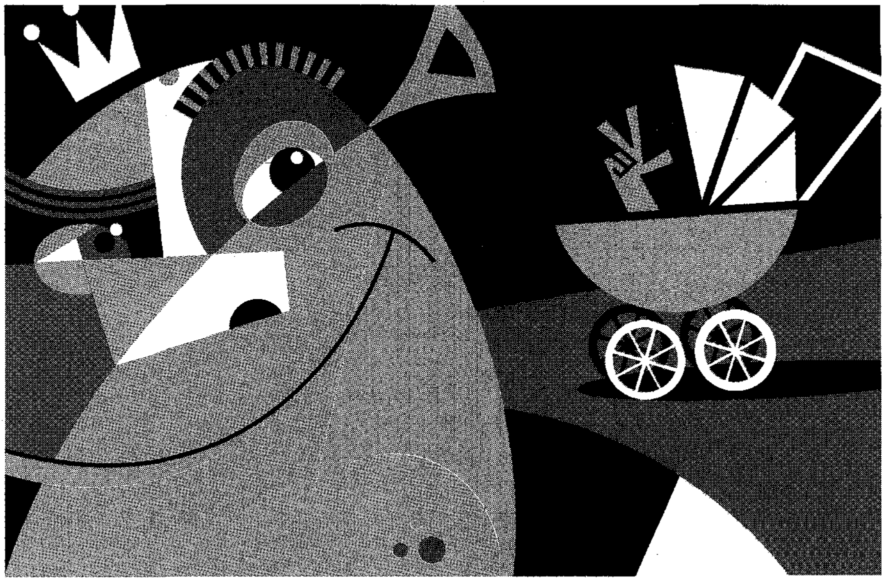
"Shrek the Third" and "Paprika."

BY DAVID DENBY

At a recent preview screening of "Shrek the Third," I was settling into my seat, enjoying the good sight lines (nothing but pipsqueaks between me and the screen) and the excited anticipation of the children, when a little voice behind me said, "Have to turn off my cell phone now." The child, a girl, couldn't have been more than seven. Was she kidding? Alas, she wasn't. Even in this culture, seven is too early for irony. Then, as the movie began, I realized that a child with a cell phone represents what DreamWorks Animation, the producer of this most lucrative of franchise animated features, envisions its audience to be—tiny, pre-corporate techies who live far from the fairy-tale emotion of enchantment. "The Chronicles of Narnia" and the "Harry Potter" series have discovered their own kind of wonder, but the gang at DreamWorks assumes that its audience lives in an unillusioned media world.

But there's a mystery here. Did the girl's parents read to her from the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen? Has she seen "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" or any of the other drippy-beautiful Disney animated features, with their butterflies and wondrous glades and shimmering harp glissandos? DreamWorks must assume that she has, and has no tender feelings for them, because the "Shrek" movies are filled with parodies of the old, honeyed Disney style. The parents may get more of the jokes than the children do, but the kids are being fed non-stop satirical hobbledehoydom, in which past and present, Gothic dungeons and Valley Girl talk, are all jumbled together. The "Shrek" phenomenon is one of those seeming oddities in our culture—children being entertained with derision before they've been ravished by awe. Maybe seven isn't too early for irony after all. "Shrek" is postmodernism for towheads, pastiche for the potty-trained.

Once upon a time, the most wonderful of all children's authors, William Steig, brought out, at the age of eighty-three, a book that became *the* book in many families, including mine, where the boys relished its snarly splendor. "Shrek!," published in 1990, is about a creature—warty, lousy, gap-toothed, noisome, and green—who is utterly self-confident. Shrek is so blind to beauty that he's invulnerable. Nothing scares him, except his sweaty bad dream of being loved by children, but he scares everyone else. He has magical powers—his noxious fumes, which cause flowers and dragons to wilt. For all its acrid temper, "Shrek!" was very much a charmed fairy tale: the perfectly ugly creature finds his perfectly ugly mate. "And they lived horribly ever after."



Hollywood in-jokes still proliferate in the latest movie to star the green ogre.

PABLO LOBATO

The Shrek that DreamWorks designed is a much more benign figure. He is smooth rather than lumpy, ugly-cute rather than ugly-scary. (His beloved, named Princess Fiona in the movies, is ugly-cute, too. She looks like Miss Piggy.) Shrek lost the knob on the top of his head, which now narrows above the eyes, giving him a look of permanent anxiety. In the first movie, which came out in 2001, Mike Myers, as the voice of Shrek, gave him a foul temper. Shrek didn't want to play the hero; he just wanted to regain exclusive title to his beloved swamp, where, in a dastardly resettlement scheme, the evil Lord Farquaad (John Lithgow) had dumped all the disused fairy-tale creatures from old Disney movies. Shrek set out to rescue Princess Fiona (Cameron Diaz) from a dragon as part of a real-estate deal with Farquaad, in which he would get back his muddy front yard in return for the girl. But, when Fiona turned out to really be as ugly as Shrek, he found a wife. In "Shrek 2" (2004), Shrek and Fiona, happily ogred, pass up the temptations of beauty and retain their natural dark-lime hue. The message of the first two movies was that you have to be yourself, an idea that came off, in this context, as the kind of mass-marketed individualism that induces teen-agers to buy cutoff jeans. It was very different from Steig's mood of defiant self-sufficiency.

It's not a big surprise that the material was unnecessarily softened, or that DreamWorks dropped Steig's merry Yiddishkeit. (In the book, Shrek runs into a witch chanting "Otchky-potchky," which sounds like a street game Steig might have learned growing up in the Bronx.) What was put in place of Steig's special flavor was the acidity of corporate competition—DreamWorks' rivalry with Disney for the animation market. As many people pointed out at the time, the figure of Farquaad, who was stumpy and egotistical, may have been a swipe at Michael Eisner, who was then Disney's chairman and the former boss of Jeffrey Katzenberg, a DreamWorks partner. And the movie's strategy of teasing old Disney characters may have derived, in part, from a dispute going back to 1994, when Katzenberg left Disney and Eisner refused to pay the hundreds of millions of dollars he felt were due him. The "Shrek" movies are funny, but the wised-up style of the comedy—the Hollywood put-ons and inside gags—has sour roots, and, after a while, the industry jokiness becomes a little nauseating.

In "Shrek the Third," which was directed by Chris Miller, Fiona's father, the frog king, is dying, and he tells Shrek (Myers) that *he* must now be ruler of Far, Far Away, the land in which they all live. Since this is the last thing Shrek wants, he goes on a quest for a substitute—Fiona's cousin Arthur (Justin Timberlake), known as Artie, who is a student at Worcestershire Academy, a kind of medieval Burbank High, in which snarky kids in jerkins smoke frankincense and myrrh. The plot material isn't as strong as in the first two movies—if anything, it feels a bit desperate—but the anti-Disney joke blunderbuss remains in good working order: the movie takes several shots at Disney's recent forays into melodious Broadway kitsch. Eddie Murphy and Antonio Banderas, who sparked "Shrek" and "Shrek 2," as, respectively, Donkey and Puss in Boots, are used less centrally than before, but Rupert Everett, so snide that he has become uncastable as anything but a voice, is quite splendid as the arch-loser, Prince Charming. Everett is in touch with the spirit, though perhaps not the body, of William Steig's incomparable creation.

The characters in the "Shrek" series may resemble rubber bathtub toys, but DreamWorks' computer-generated imagery, with its three-dimensional look, gives them shadows and weight as they fling themselves hither and yon into distant castle-strewn perspectives. By contrast, the brilliant "Paprika," directed by Satoshi Kon—a masterly example of Japanese anime, intended for adults—is partly hand drawn, and features multiple areas of visual activity layered at different distances from the picture plane. Set in a business world of long white corridors and glass walls and research labs, it's a Freudian-Jungian-Felliniesque sci-fi thriller, and an outright challenge to American viewers, who may, in the face of its whirligig complexity, feel almost pea-brained. Paprika, the heroine, is an eighteen-year-old sprite—a kind of sexy Japanese Tinker Bell—who enters people's dreams as a form of therapy. She explains to one of her patients, a detective haunted by a murder he was unable to prevent, that the first dreams we have when we fall asleep are like arty short films and longer dreams are like blockbusters. In "Paprika," this connection between dreams and movies is worked to a fare-thee-well, but there are other levels of representation, too—Internet sites, which characters enter bodily, and, appearing now and then, a kind of collective unconscious, in which a parade of toys and icons (including the Statue of Liberty) march through an enormous city with a menacing, throbbing insistence that borders on the fascistic. All of Japanese pop is there. For Japanese traditionalists, the parade must be a true nightmare.

Paprika, it turns out, has a Clark Kent-like double, Dr. Chiba, a beautiful research scientist, who works at a company that has developed a machine—the DC-MINI—that also enters dreams. Human beings, it seems, will go mad if they don't dream, but "Paprika" is about people whose dreams have been maddened: one of the DC-MINI prototypes has been copped by an evil genius who wants to possess everyone's inner life and is mucking around with the sleep of Chiba's colleagues. As Paprika and Chiba enter the dreams—which are fleshed out with familiar images that become increasingly threatening—they undergo wild adventures: terrifying, violent, and sometimes sexual. "Paprika" asks, "Who shall control our dreams?," which, given this film's take on the cinematic nature of the unconscious, is really asking, "Who shall control the movies?" Paprika's detective friend also feels guilty because he once betrayed a fellow-student who was a filmmaker. When he saves Paprika from death, and she, in turn, cures him of his guilt, he is free, for the first time in years, to go to the movies. After some of the most outrageous leaps ever conjoined in a single film, "Paprika" comes to rest with the simple act of a man buying a ticket. Amen. ♦

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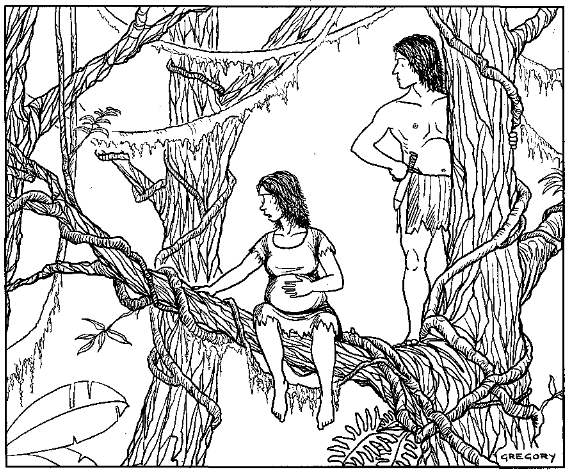
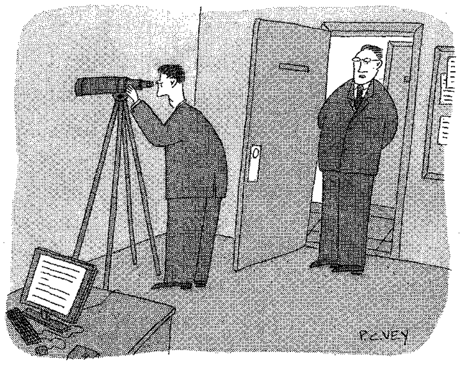
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, May 27th. Finalists in the May 14th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 11th & 18th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Fine. If it's a boy, we'll call him Boy. But if it's a girl I want to call her McKenzie."
Fairleigh Brooks, Louisville, Ky.



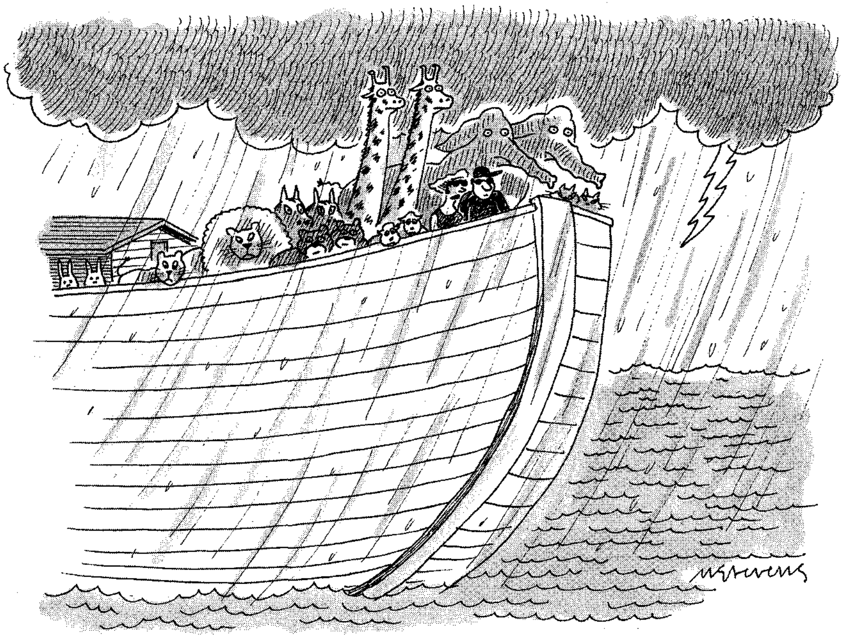
THE FINALISTS

"Let me know when the paint is dry."
Ken Pellerin, Groveland, Mass.

"When you're finished here, Spencer, we'll need you on the bridge-to-nowhere project."
Richard Hine, New York City

"Comrade Zinkov, I would prefer that you spy looking through windows and listening through walls."
Robert Cooke, Highland, Ind.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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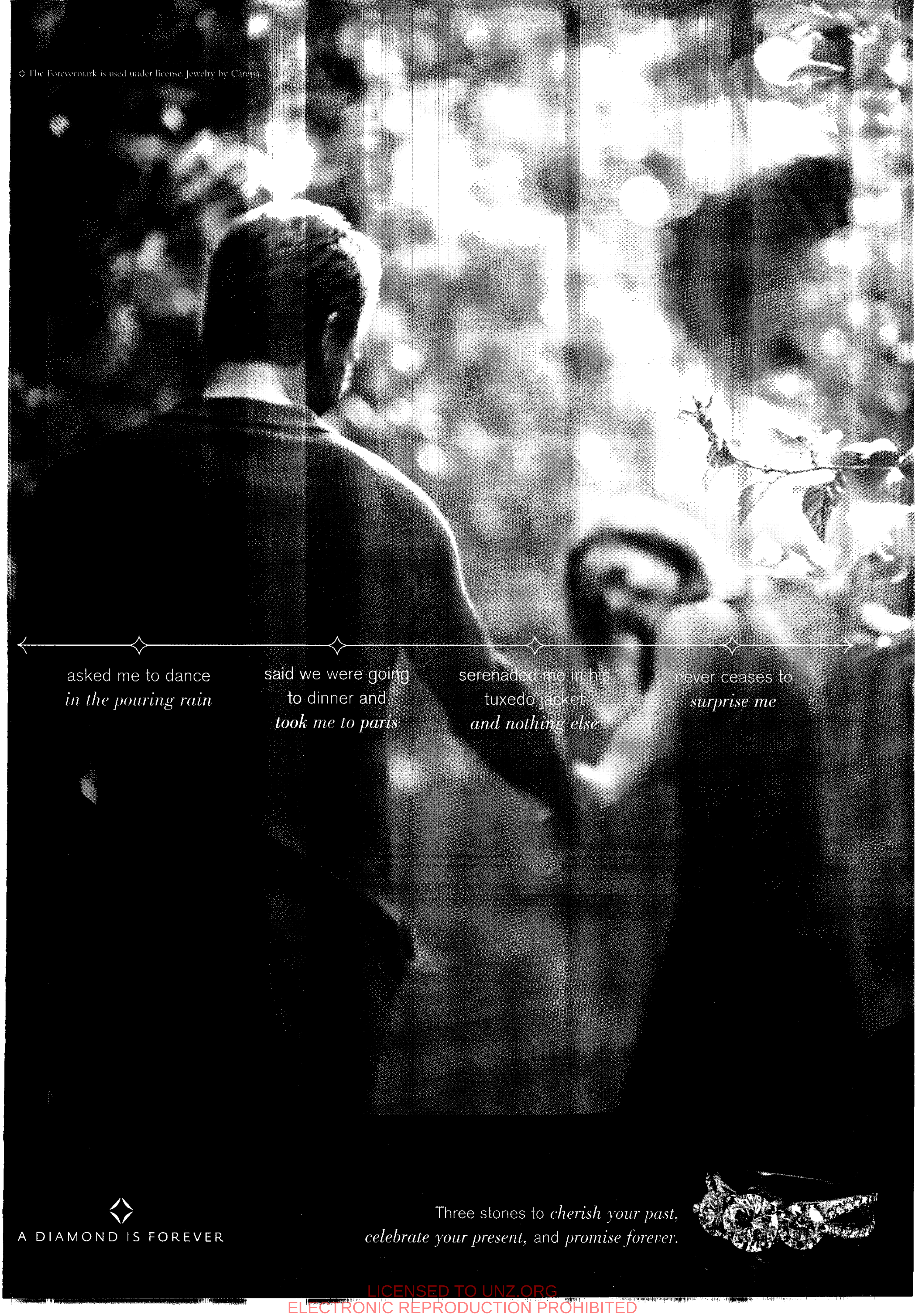
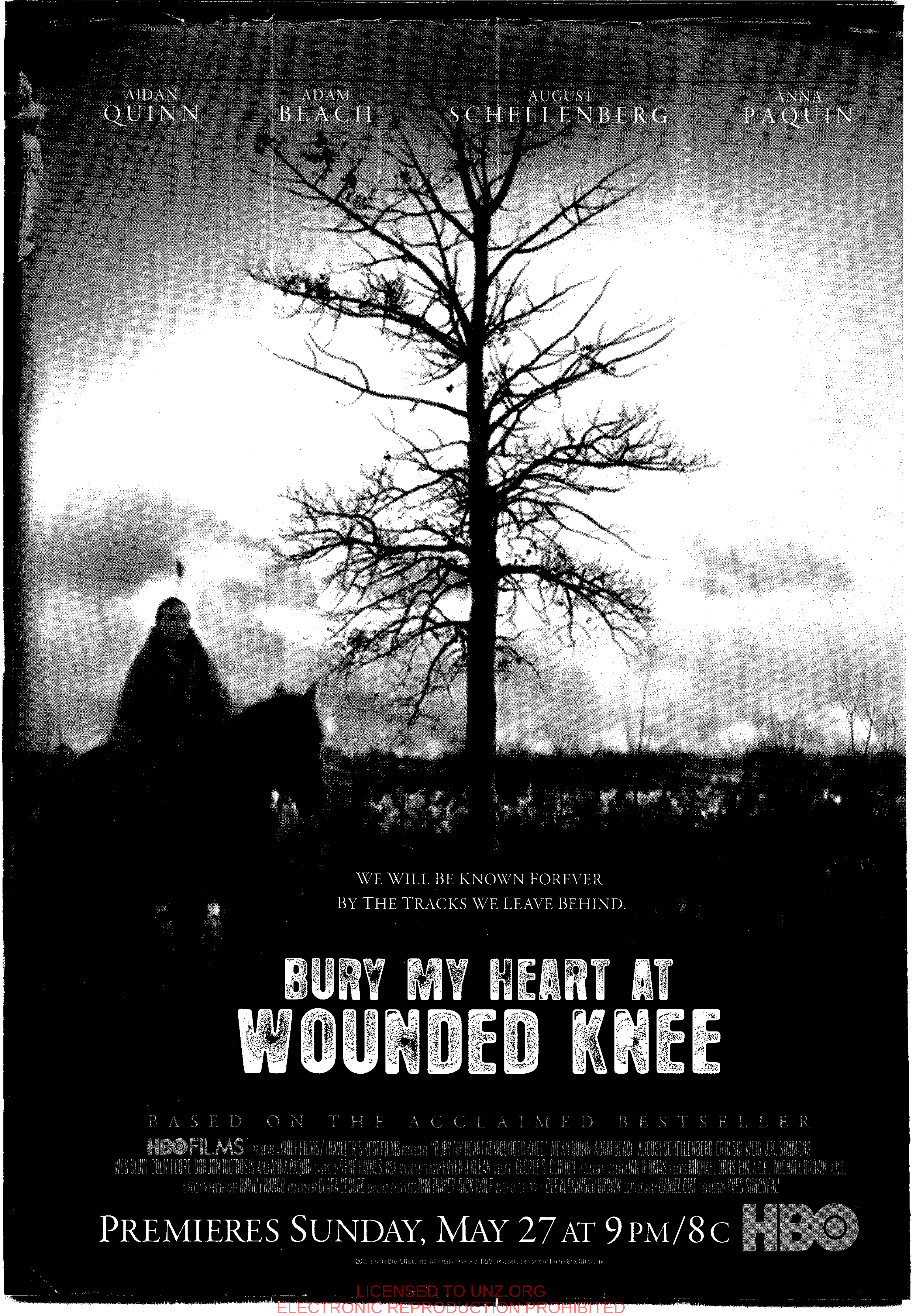

The Forevermark is used under license. Jewelry by Caressa.
asked me to dance *in the pouring rain*
said we were going to dinner and *took me to paris*
serenaded me in his tuxedo jacket *and nothing else*
never ceases to *surprise me*
A DIAMOND IS FOREVER
Three stones to *cherish your past, celebrate your present,* and *promise forever.*



AIDAN QUINN

ADAM BEACH

AUGUST SCHELLENBERG

ANNA PAQUIN

WE WILL BE KNOWN FOREVER
BY THE TRACKS WE LEAVE BEHIND.

BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE

BASED ON THE ACCLAIMED BESTSELLER

HBO FILMS presents a WOLF FILMS / TRAVELER'S REST FILMS production "BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE" AIDAN QUINN ADAM BEACH AUGUST SCHELLENBERG ERIC SCHWEIG J.K. SIMMONS WES STUDI COLM FEORE GORDON TOOTOOSIS and ANNA PAQUIN casting by RENE HAYNES, CSA music supervisor EVYEN J. KLEAN music by GEORGE S. CLINTON production designer IAN THOMAS editors MICHAEL ORNSTEIN, A.C.E., MICHAEL BROWN, A.C.E. director of photography DAVID FRANCO produced by CLARA GEORGE executive producers TOM THAYER DICK WOLF based on the book by DEE ALEXANDER BROWN screenplay by DANIEL GIAT directed by YVES SIMONEAU

PREMIERES SUNDAY, MAY 27 AT 9 PM/8C HBO

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